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**Report on the Pretest  
of the Reaching the  
Working Poor and  
Poor Elderly Survey**

**Volume I**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Less than one-half of working households and less than two-fifths of elderly households that are thought to be eligible for food stamps actually received them in 1994.<sup>1</sup> One way of increasing our understanding of the reasons for these low rates of participation in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) would be to conduct a national survey of nonparticipants who are eligible for the program. Because such a survey would have to overcome conceptual and operational challenges, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture contracted with Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. to design and test a survey of the reasons for nonparticipation among low-income working and elderly households. This report discusses our experiences conducting a pretest of this survey and our recommendations for the design and fielding of a larger national survey about the reasons for nonparticipation in the FSP.

We faced three major challenges in designing a survey of the reasons for nonparticipation in the FSP. The first challenge was to identify people who were eligible for the FSP but did not participate in the program. No lists of these people exist, so we needed to start with a random-digit-dialing (RDD) sample frame. Second, to identify persons who were eligible for food stamps, we needed to strike a balance between asking detailed and often sensitive questions to make an accurate determination of eligibility, and keeping the screening interview short and the response rate high. The third challenge was to develop questionnaires that collected sufficient information to identify the reasons for nonparticipation.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE PRETEST**

An RDD frame was used to identify FSP nonparticipants who were likely to be eligible for food stamps. We called nearly 17,000 telephone numbers to identify 484 nonparticipants who were likely to be eligible for food stamps and met our other criteria for inclusion in the sample. We also identified 92 FSP participants using RDD. Another 86 FSP participants were identified from a list of program participants provided by state FSP agencies. A short screening interview was used to check whether the respondents met our criteria for inclusion in the sample. The survey pretest began in January 1998 and lasted about three months.

A main questionnaire was administered to 451 respondents who met our criteria for inclusion in the sample. The questionnaires asked about characteristics of the households, attitudes, experiences with the FSP and, if the respondents were nonparticipants, about the reasons they did not participate in the program. We developed eight different versions of the questionnaire. Each type of respondent--working nonparticipant, working participant, elderly nonparticipant, elderly participant--was administered a different questionnaire. And for each type of respondent, we used two different lengths of interviews--a short and a long version.

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<sup>1</sup>The number of persons eligible for food stamp benefits was estimated from Survey of Income and Program Participation data and the number of participants was calculated from Food Stamp Program administrative data (Stavrianos, 1997).

All the initial screening interviews were conducted by telephone. To test whether the questionnaires could also be administered in-person, we administered about 15 percent of the questionnaires in-person. The pretest took place in six urban sites and two rural sites.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Our experiences and findings during the pretest suggest the following conclusions and recommendations regarding conducting a national survey of the reasons for nonparticipation.

### **1. It is Feasible to Conduct a Stand-Alone Survey on the Reasons for Nonparticipation**

The pretest showed that it is feasible to conduct a stand-alone survey about the reasons for nonparticipation. However, the survey would require considerable survey resources, mainly because of the difficulties identifying survey respondents. We estimate that it would take just over 18,000 hours of interviewer labor to identify a sample of about 1,000 FSP-eligible nonparticipants from working households and 1,000 eligible nonparticipants from elderly households.

### **2. A List-Frame is Needed if the Survey is to Include FSP Participants**

If RDD is being used to identify nonparticipants, identifying participants *at the same time* requires little additional interviewer time. However, identifying participants by RDD once the sample of nonparticipants has been identified is many times more costly than identifying participants using the list-frame. As we found working and elderly participant households were not as prevalent in the population as working and elderly nonparticipant households, a mixed-frame design would be the most efficient one if participants are included in the survey.

### **3. A Final Response Rate of About 65 Percent Could Be Achieved on a Stand-Alone Survey on the Reasons for Nonparticipation**

Nonresponse is a concern because, if the factors that determine whether a person responds to the survey are related to the reasons for nonparticipation, the survey findings may be biased. The overall response rate to the pretest survey was about 51 percent--the response rate to the screening interviews was just under 60 percent; the completion rate to the main questionnaires was 85 percent. With the recommended changes to the survey, the response rate to the screening interviews in a national survey could be as high as 70 percent and the completion rate to the main questionnaire as high as 90 or 95 percent, yielding an overall response rate to the survey of 63 to 67 percent. The recommended changes to the survey that would have the most effect on the response rate are:

- C Changing the order of the questions on the RDD screening interview, so that the interviewer begins with questions directly related to the FSP and does not ask about income until the fourth or fifth question.
- C Adding more interviewer probes to the screening interview to assure respondents of confidentiality.
- C Sending an advance letter about the study to persons on the RDD sample frame with listed addresses.
- C Lengthening the field period to increase the number of RDD telephone numbers for which the residential status can be determined.
- C Increasing the likelihood that the respondent to the screening interview can also respond to the main questionnaire by relaxing the criteria for determining the household member who can respond to the main questionnaire.
- C Administering a main questionnaire shorter than the long version used in the pretest.

#### **4. The RDD Screening Interview Used in the Pretest Strikes the Right Balance Between Determining Eligibility and Minimizing Nonresponse**

Most previous studies of FSP nonparticipation used crude screening rules to create samples of nonparticipants who were likely to be eligible for food stamps. The RDD screening interview used in the pretest used more sophisticated screening rules that required data on income, vehicles, and assets. Even so, we estimate that 38 percent of the respondents found eligible by the RDD screening interview seem to be FSP-ineligible based on information given later in the interview. The screening interview used in the pretest, with some changes, hits about the right balance between the two objectives of keeping the interview short and simple and predicting FSP eligibility well.

#### **5. The Screening Interview and Main Questionnaires Should be Administered Using Computer Assisted Survey Methods**

A national survey about nonparticipation should use computer assisted survey interviews (CASI) for both the screening interviews and the main questionnaires. CASI supports sample management and scheduling, aids the interviewer in conducting complex skip logic, and automatically determines whether the respondent is eligible for the sample. Using CASI will shorten the administration times of the main questionnaires.

## **6. A Survey About the Reasons for Nonparticipation Should Include a Small Sample of Households Without Telephones and Ask Telephone Households About Telephone Interruptions**

About 20 percent of low-income households do not have working telephones. Because households without telephones may have different reasons for not participating in the FSP than households with telephones, a national survey of the reasons for nonparticipation should include a small sample of respondents without telephones. Interviewers would administer both a screening interview and the main questionnaire in-person.

Because working and elderly FSP-eligible households that do not have telephones are not common, considerable survey resources would be needed to identify such households. For this reason, the sample of non-telephone households would need to be small and screening for them should take place in areas with a high concentration of non-telephone households.

To reduce the required sample size of non-telephone households, we recommend collecting data about past interruptions of telephone service from households currently *with* telephones. If non-telephone households and households with interruptions in telephone service have similar reasons for not participating in the FSP, data on interruptions in telephone service can be used to statistically adjust for the underrepresentation of non-telephone households.

We also recommend that *both* FSP participants and FSP-eligible nonparticipant non-telephone households be administered the main questionnaires. By interviewing all FSP-eligible non-telephone households, information would be collected to determine the FSP participation rate among non-telephone households. It may be that the participation rate is so high among non-telephone households, that nonparticipation among non-telephone households is not a concern.

## **7. A Questionnaire About Nonparticipation Should Include Closed-Ended Structured Questions About Nonparticipation**

In previous surveys, the questions about nonparticipation were typically broad and open-ended and elicited responses that were too vague to inform policy decisions. Hence, we designed a series of direct closed-ended questions about the reasons for nonparticipation. Each question asked whether a particular reason was applicable to the respondent. At the end of the series of questions, we asked whether there were other reasons why the respondent did not participate and which was *the most important reason* that the respondent did not participate. For some reasons, more detailed follow-up questions were asked. Even on their own, these questions could provide much detailed information about the reasons for nonparticipation.



## **8. A Questionnaire About Nonparticipation Should Include Questions to Determine FSP Eligibility, Food Security, and Sources of Food Assistance**

Questions to determine the likely FSP eligibility of the respondent are important because including persons who are not eligible for food stamps in the sample may bias the survey findings. Because of concerns about the response rate, the screening interview cannot ask all the detailed questions required to determine FSP eligibility. However, some of these questions can be asked later in the main interview when the interviewer has established rapport with the respondent.

Data on food security are important because if most nonparticipants are food secure, the FSP may be meeting its mission of providing food assistance to those who need it, and low rates of participation are not a cause for concern.

The findings from the pretest suggest that many working and elderly households do not participate in the FSP because they feel they did not need food stamps. It is important to determine whether the lack of need is because nonparticipants are receiving food assistance from other sources such as other government programs, charities, family, or friends.

## **9. The Questionnaires Developed For This Study Should be Revised to Address FSP Nonparticipation Issues Arising from Recent Welfare Reform**

Changes associated with recent welfare reform may have affected the likelihood that working households and, to a lesser extent, elderly households participate in the FSP. FSP participation may have been affected in three ways. First, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) clients who discontinue TANF receipt because they find work, reach the time limits for TANF receipt, or are sanctioned for not meeting TANF work requirements may discontinue receipt of food stamp benefits at the same time even if they are still eligible for food stamp benefits. Second, welfare reform may have reduced the likelihood that persons applying for TANF also apply for food stamp benefits at the same time, because TANF applicants are not made aware of their eligibility for food stamp benefits at this time. Third, welfare reform may have increased the importance of psychological factors, such as the stigma of FSP receipt or use or the desire to be self-sufficient, as reasons for nonparticipation. With some minor revisions, the questionnaires could collect information on how welfare reform has affected the reasons for nonparticipation in the FSP.

## **10. A 20-Minute Main Questionnaire Would Collect Sufficient Information About Nonparticipation To Make Policy Decisions**

Because of concerns of respondent burden and response rates, we recommend using a slightly shorter version of the long questionnaires that would take about 20 minutes to administer. It would include questions about the reasons for nonparticipation, previous experiences respondents have had applying for and using food stamps, food security and sources of food assistance, the demographic composition of the household, and questions about income, expenses, and vehicles.

## **11. If Survey Resources are Limited, Consideration Should Be Given To Excluding Participants From the Survey**

We recommend that FNS consider conducting a telephone survey of only nonparticipants. A survey of nonparticipants would save considerable survey resources and could provide sufficient information about the reasons for nonparticipation to inform policy. Comparisons of participants and nonparticipants yield findings that are suggestive of reasons for nonparticipation but rarely provide firm evidence that a particular reason is important. If resources permitted, surveying participants does allow comparisons between participants and nonparticipants of economic and demographic characteristics and previous experiences with the FSP which are useful in identifying types of persons who are most likely to not participate. It also allows an exploration of the ways in which participants overcame real or perceived barriers to participation. However, comparisons between participants and nonparticipants of household demographic and economic characteristics, sources of other food assistance, and food security can be made from existing data.

## **12. Consideration Should be Given To Adding A Module About FSP Nonparticipation to Another Household Survey**

An alternative to conducting a stand-alone survey would be to add a short module about the reasons for FSP nonparticipation to another household survey. The module would begin with the screening questions, and only persons who meet the criteria in the screening interview would then be asked questions about nonparticipation. At a minimum, we recommend a 15- to 20-minute module that includes: (1) the screening questions, (2) the direct questions about nonparticipation, (3) questions about whether the respondent has previously applied for or used food stamps, (4) questions about food security and sources of food assistance.

Adding a module to an existing household survey would significantly reduce the costs of collecting the data since only the additional costs associated with a longer interview would be incurred. Depending on the survey to which the module is added, the response rate to the questions may also be higher. Some household surveys contain detailed questions about income by source, and these data could be used to screen for eligibility for the add-on module on nonparticipation. However, the household survey that the module is added to must be large enough to ensure sufficient samples of FSP-eligible nonparticipants in working and elderly households.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Less than one-half of working households and less than two-fifths of elderly households that were thought to be eligible for food stamps actually received them in January 1994 (Stavrianos 1997).<sup>2</sup> One way of increasing our understanding of the reasons for these low rates of participation in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) would be to conduct a national survey of nonparticipants who are eligible for the program. Because such a survey would have to overcome conceptual and operational challenges, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) contracted with Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR) to design and test a survey of the reasons for nonparticipation among low-income working and elderly households.<sup>3</sup> This report discusses our experiences conducting a pretest of this survey and our recommendations for the design and fielding of a larger national survey about the reasons for nonparticipation in the FSP.

Why should we care about low rates of participation in the FSP? This is an especially pertinent question given that the aim of recent welfare reform legislation was to reduce the number of people dependent on welfare. The answer is because the mission of the FSP is to provide food assistance to all persons who need it, so low participation rates may be an indication that the program is not fulfilling its mission. If the program has features that discourage persons who need food assistance from participating, or if persons in need don't know about the program or how to apply, then changes in the program need to be made for it to fulfill its mission. On the other hand, if people do not participate because they do not

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<sup>2</sup>The number of persons eligible for the Food Stamp Program (FSP) was estimated from Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) data and the number of FSP participants was calculated from FSP administrative data.

<sup>3</sup>This was part of a study entitled *Reaching the Working Poor and Poor Elderly*.

need food stamps, then the low participation rates would not be a cause for concern and program changes would not be needed.

We faced three major challenges in designing a survey of the reasons for nonparticipation in the FSP. The first challenge was to identify people who were eligible for the FSP but did not participate in the program. No lists of these people exist, so we needed to start with a random-digit-dialing (RDD) sample frame. Second, to identify persons who were eligible for food stamps, we needed to strike a balance between asking detailed and often sensitive questions to make an accurate determination of eligibility, and keeping the screening interview short and the response rate high. The third challenge was to develop questionnaires that collected sufficient information to identify the reasons for nonparticipation. In previous surveys about nonparticipation, the questions had elicited responses that were too vague to inform policy decisions (McConnell and Nixon 1996).

This report discusses our experiences meeting these challenges. We address three broad questions:

1. How well did the procedures work for identifying respondents for the survey?
2. How well did the questionnaires collect the information they were designed to collect?
3. Do the questionnaires collect sufficient information to address the questions of why working and elderly households have low rates of participation in the FSP?

Each of the next three chapters of this report addresses one of these questions. We conclude the report with a discussion of our conclusions and recommendations. The rest of this introductory chapter describes the survey pretest.

## **A. OVERVIEW OF THE PRETEST**

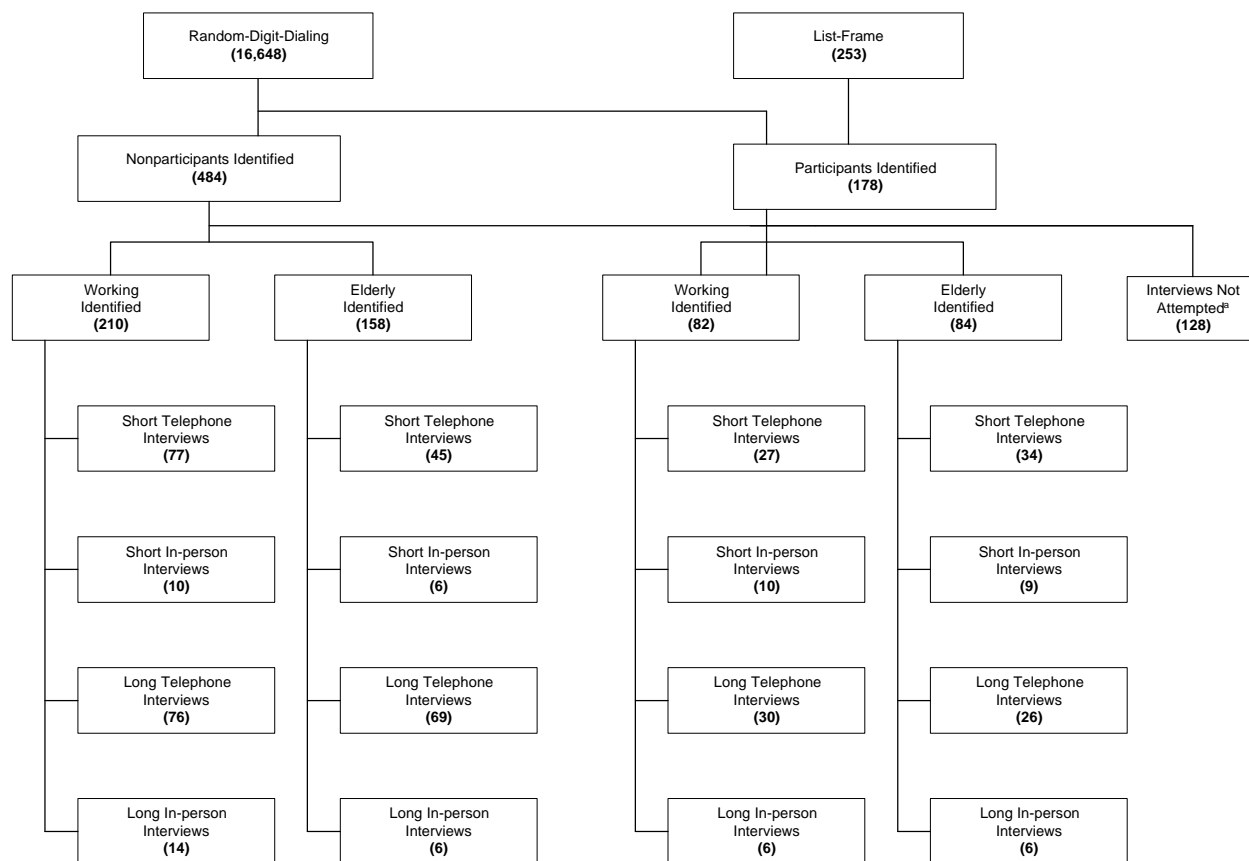
The structure of the pretest was complex. It used two sample frames (an RDD frame and a list frame), 10 different instruments (2 screening interviews and 8 main questionnaires), and two interview modes (telephone and in-person). Figure I.1 illustrates the structure of the pretest.

The RDD frame was used to identify FSP nonparticipants who were likely to be eligible for food stamps. We called nearly 17,000 telephone numbers to identify 484 nonparticipants who were likely to be eligible for food stamps and met our other criteria for inclusion in the sample. We also identified 92 FSP participants using RDD. The pretest of the RDD survey began in January 1998 and lasted about three months. Another 86 FSP participants were identified from a list of program participants provided by state FSP agencies. A short screening interview was used to check whether the respondents met our criteria for inclusion in the sample. The list-frame survey began in February 1998 and lasted about two months.

Respondents who met our criteria for inclusion in the sample were administered a main questionnaire that asked about their experiences with the FSP and, if they were nonparticipants, about the reasons they did not participate in the program. We developed eight different versions of the questionnaire. Each type of respondent--working nonparticipant, working participant, elderly nonparticipant, elderly participant--was administered a different questionnaire. And for each type of respondent, we used two different lengths of interviews--a short and a long version.

In a national survey on nonparticipation, both the screening questionnaires and the main questionnaires would be administered by telephone to households that have working telephones but both the screening and the main questionnaires would be administered in-person to households without telephones. In the pretest, we tested whether the main questionnaires worked well in-person by administering about 15 percent of the main questionnaires in-person. The other 85 percent of the

FIGURE I.1  
OVERVIEW OF PRETEST



\*These interviews were not attempted because either the respondent spoke Spanish or the target for that type of respondent had been met.

questionnaires were administered by telephone. To contain the cost of the pretest, we conducted all of the screening interviews by telephone.

The main questionnaires were administered using hard-copy instruments, both when administered by telephone and by person. Both the RDD and list-frame screening interviews were conducted by telephone using computer-assisted-telephone-interviewing (CATI).<sup>4</sup> With CATI, the interview questions are displayed on a computer screen and the interviewers type the responses directly into the computer. The advantages of CATI over using a hard-copy interview are:

- Ⓒ ***It allows complicated skip logic.*** The computer will automatically follow the questionnaire skip logic. For example, in the RDD screening interview, the CATI system automatically presented different questions to respondents who said they received food stamps and to those who said they did not.
- Ⓒ ***It can perform calculations.*** The CATI system automatically determined FSP-eligibility based on responses to the screening questions so that the interviewers were not required to do manual calculations.
- Ⓒ ***It aids in managing the sample.*** CATI automatically assigns respondents to the appropriate sample cells (such as working nonparticipants) and maintains records of the status of each cell.
- Ⓒ ***It aids in the scheduling of interviews.*** CATI automatically selects the telephone number to be dialed and schedules callbacks to unsuccessful contacts at different times of the day and on different days.
- Ⓒ ***It avoids costly data entry.*** The data are already in electronic form and can be more easily transformed into an analysis data file.

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<sup>4</sup>Some of the statistical results that are used in this report were produced using computer programs made available through the Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program (CSM), University of California, Berkeley. Neither the CSM staff nor the University of California bear any responsibility for the results or conclusions presented here.

With CATI, up-front programming is required for each instrument. The savings from using CATI will offset these programming costs if the sample is large, as it was for the screening interviews in the pretest. However, because the number of respondents for each main questionnaire in the pretest was small, it was more efficient to administer the main questionnaires using hard-copy instruments rather than CATI.

The pretest took place in eight sites in ten counties: (1) Suffolk County, Massachusetts, (2) Galveston, Texas, (3) Adams County, Colorado, (4) Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, (5) Ramsey County, Minnesota, (6) Durham, North Carolina, (7) Bedford County, Pennsylvania, and (8) Murray, Lincoln, and Lyon Counties, Minnesota.

## **B. THE SCREENING INTERVIEWS**

To identify respondents for the full survey, we used a short telephone screening interview. (Volume II of this report contains copies of the screening interviews). The screening interviews contain a number of “tests” to determine whether the respondent is eligible for inclusion in the sample. Once the screening interview determined that a respondent was *not* eligible for inclusion in the sample, the interview was concluded. Respondents who were found eligible for inclusion in the sample were administered a main questionnaire.

A respondent was determined eligible for inclusion in the sample if his or her household contained either a working or an elderly person and either (1) the household was participating in the FSP and had applied for benefits in the previous three years, or (2) the household was not participating in the program but was likely to be eligible for food stamp benefits. We required that participating respondents had applied for food stamps within the previous three years so that the respondents could



clearly recollect their experiences applying for food stamps. Our criteria for whether a household was counted as working, elderly, a FSP participant, or a FSP nonparticipant were as follows:

- C ***Working.*** A household was counted as working if any adult in the household worked for pay during either the current or previous month. The two-month time period allowed us to include people who had some recent attachment to the labor market but were not currently working.
- C ***Elderly.*** A household was counted as elderly if anyone in the household was 60 years of age or older.
- C ***FSP Participant.*** A household was counted as participating if anyone in the household received FSP benefits in either the current or previous month (and had applied within the past three years). We included households who reported receiving food stamps in the previous month, as some people may not view themselves as participating if they have not yet received their benefits for the current month.
- C ***FSP Nonparticipant.*** A household is counted as not participating if no-one in the household received FSP benefits in the current or previous month.

Determining whether a person is likely to be eligible for the FSP requires a lot of detailed information--more than we could collect in a short screening interview. Hence, we chose the following relatively simple criteria to simulate the FSP-eligibility determination process.<sup>5</sup> Respondents were considered categorically-eligible for food stamps if they reported that everyone in their households received during either the current or previous month Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or General Assistance (GA). If everyone in the household did not receive these benefits, the respondent was considered likely to be eligible for food stamps only if all of the following tests were met:

1. ***Their household income was less than 130 percent of the poverty threshold.*** This simulates the FSP-eligibility test that requires gross household income not to exceed 130 percent of poverty. Although elderly households and households that contain disabled

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<sup>5</sup>These criteria were based on the findings of a study of the errors that would be made predicting FSP eligibility using survey data (McConnell 1997).

persons are not subject to this gross income eligibility test, they are subject to a requirement that income net of certain expenses and deductions does not exceed 100 percent of poverty. As simulating the net income test requires too many detailed questions for a short screening interview, we approximated the net income test with the requirement that gross income must not exceed 130 percent of poverty for elderly and disabled households.

2. ***The household did not own any vehicle that was manufactured in the past five years.*** For most FSP applicants, the fair market value of their vehicles (exceeding \$4,650) is counted as an asset. McConnell (1997) found that the age of the household's vehicles was a good proxy for their value and a good predictor of whether a household was eligible for food stamps.
3. ***The value of the household's financial assets was less than \$3,000 if the household contained an elderly person, and \$2,000 if the household did not contain an elderly person.*** The FSP asset eligibility test requires that the value of all counted household assets, including the counted value of vehicles, do not exceed these levels.
4. ***The household had not been informed by the FSP that it is ineligible for food stamps in the previous two months.*** This will screen out some respondents who may be ineligible for other reasons, such as they do not meet the citizenship requirement or they are able-bodied adults without dependents who have not met the work requirement.

If the respondent passed these tests, the interviewer determined who in the household should be administered a main questionnaire. Our criterion was that a respondent to a nonparticipant questionnaire should be the person in the household who *would* apply for food stamps if the household decided to participate and that the respondent to a participant questionnaire should be the person in the household who last applied for food stamps. This meant that the respondent to the main questionnaire sometimes differed from the person who was administered the screening interview.

Using the responses to the screening interview, the computer determined whether an eligible respondent should be administered a working nonparticipant, an elderly nonparticipant, a working participant, or an elderly participant questionnaire. The computer determined randomly whether a respondent should be administered a short or a long questionnaire. It also determined, by the respondent's

zip code, whether the questionnaire would be administered by telephone or in-person. If the main questionnaire was to be administered by telephone, the interviewer administered the questionnaire directly after completing the screening interview. If the questionnaire was to be administered in person, at the end of the screening interview the interviewer would tell the respondent that an interviewer would be calling within one week to arrange an interview in his or her home.

To identify persons who are likely to be eligible for food stamps but not receiving them, we used RDD. In RDD, the sample frame includes telephone numbers of households with high income and households that contain neither a working nor an elderly person. Thus respondents were first asked a set of screening questions to establish their eligibility for the survey. If we identified from the RDD sample frame a FSP participant who was in an elderly or working household, and had applied for food stamps within the previous three years, we included the participant in the sample and administered a participant questionnaire.

We also used a list frame developed from program-records files to locate FSP participants. We requested that the states in the study provide us lists of current FSP participants who were in either a working or an elderly household. We sent the lists to the local FSP offices, where caseworkers updated the addresses and telephone numbers of persons on the sample frame. Persons on the list-frame were also administered a screening interview to check that they met the criteria for inclusion in our sample. If we found persons on the list-frame who were no longer receiving food stamps, they were deemed ineligible for the survey.

The screening interviews were conducted in English and also, when needed, in Spanish. However, we did not translate the main questionnaires and so did not conduct any main interviews in Spanish.

## C. THE MAIN QUESTIONNAIRES

Respondents who met our criteria for inclusion in the sample were administered a questionnaire designed to collect information about the reasons for nonparticipation.<sup>6</sup> We designed eight versions of the questionnaires that differ according to: (1) whether they were to be administered to persons in working or elderly households; (2) whether they were to be administered to participants or nonparticipants; and (3) whether they were “short” or “long” in the time required for their administration. (Volume II of this report includes copies of all the questionnaires).

We included FSP participants in our survey so that we could compare the experiences, attitudes, and characteristics of participants and nonparticipants. To facilitate this comparison, the participant and nonparticipant questionnaires are similar. For example, they both ask respondents about their previous experiences with the FSP. The working and elderly questionnaires are similar because in focus groups of low-income working and elderly persons conducted for this study in 1996, the two groups gave similar reasons for not participating in the FSP (Ponza and McConnell 1996). The main differences are that the questionnaires for the respondents in working households include a section that asks about employment and the questionnaires for the respondents in elderly households include a section that asks about health. The long version of the questionnaires mainly differs from the short version in that it contains questions about employment, income, expenses, and food assistance from other sources that are not included in the short version. It also contains more questions about food security.

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<sup>6</sup>In-depth cognitive tests of the screening interviews and questionnaires were conducted in two counties in Texas in March 1997. The questionnaires were revised to take into account the findings from these tests (Ponza et al. 1997).

The main questionnaires covered the following topics:

- C Reasons for Nonparticipation (Section E).* This section was included in the nonparticipant questionnaires only. Respondents were asked in a series of closed-ended questions whether a specific factor was a reason they did not participate. It was important to ask closed-ended questions as previous surveys have found that responses to open-ended questions about reasons for nonparticipation have been too general to be useful. We also asked respondents whether the reason was an “important” reason they did not participate and asked them to name the one most important reason. For some reasons, we included follow-up questions that asked about the reason in more detail. To ensure that we asked about all factors, we also asked whether there were “other” reasons why the respondent did not participate.
- C History of FSP Applications (Section D).* We collected information from both participants and nonparticipants who had previously applied for food stamps in the past three years about the reasons they applied for food stamps, whether they applied for other benefits at the time they applied for food stamp benefits, how the respondent applied for food stamp benefits (such as, in-person or via authorized representative), and specific problems that they may have encountered applying. We also identified respondents who started the application process but did not complete it and probed for the reasons they did not complete the process. We also asked participants about factors that helped them overcome barriers to applying for or using food stamp benefits.
- C FSP Participation History (Section C).* We asked both participants and nonparticipants who previously received food stamps about their experiences receiving food stamp benefits in the past three years. We ask the nonparticipants who previously received food stamps why they stopped receiving them.
- C Knowledge of the FSP (Section B).* As a lack of knowledge about how to apply for food stamp benefits or the FSP eligibility rules may lead to nonparticipation, the questionnaires included questions about factors that may be related to the respondents’ knowledge of the program. We asked both participants and nonparticipants whether they received food stamps as a child and whether they knew someone who received food stamp benefits.
- C Employment History (Section H).* We collected information on employment for two reasons. First, factors related to employment (such as the stability of employment) may influence the decision to participate in the FSP. Second, information on earnings can be used to make a more accurate determination of FSP eligibility. Only the long versions of the questionnaires collected information on employment. All the long versions collected information on earnings. The working questionnaires also asked about the type of job worked and the work history of the person in the household who worked the most hours.

- C Receipt of Food Assistance from Other Sources (Section F).* We collected information on the receipt of other food assistance for two reasons. First, receipt of other food assistance has been found to be correlated with receipt of food stamps (McConnell and Nixon 1996). Second, because a lack of need for food stamp benefits is sometimes given as a reason for nonparticipation (Ponza and McConnell 1996), it is important to know whether the reported lack of need is because of receipt of food assistance from other sources. All the long versions of the questionnaires contain questions about the receipt of other food assistance.
  
- C Food Security (Section G).* In focus groups conducted for this study, people who said they did not need food stamp benefits also admitted to sometimes going without food (Ponza and McConnell 1996). From a policy perspective, it is important to determine whether the respondents who say they do not need food stamps are actually food secure. All questionnaires contained questions to determine the food security of the respondents' households.
  
- C Health (Section I).* As some elderly persons may have difficulties applying for and/or using food stamps, we asked questions about the general health and physical and cognitive functioning of the respondent. We did not ask these questions in the working questionnaires.
  
- C Social Supports (Section J).* The presence of social supports may be an important factor in determining participation in the FSP. It may indicate the extent to which family and friends can act as a safety net to the respondent. We asked in the long questionnaires a series of questions about the length of time the respondent has lived in the neighborhood, the frequency of social visits, and whether the respondent's relatives live close by.
  
- C Income and Expenses (Section K).* Information on income and expenses of the respondent is important for two reasons: (1) economic factors, such as income, may influence the decision to participate, and (2) information on income and expenses will be used to make a more informed decision about whether the respondent is FSP-eligible. The questionnaires also asked about household vehicles. This section was included in the long questionnaires only.
  
- C Household Composition and Demographic Information (Sections A and L).* Information on the demographic composition of the household is collected because it may determine the likelihood of participation. In addition, this information can be used as covariates when examining factors that affect the decision to participate in the FSP. We also asked about citizenship--a factor that may affect FSP-eligibility.

We administered the questionnaires to 451 respondents. The interviews were divided approximately equally between respondents from working households and respondents from elderly households. About two-thirds of the respondents were nonparticipants and one-third of the respondents were participants.

We conducted 69 (15 percent) of the interviews in-person. The remainder of the interviews were conducted by telephone. To contain the cost of the pretest, the in-person interviews were all conducted in areas with specific zip codes in two of the eight pretest sites. All the main questionnaires, in both in-person and telephone sites, were administered by an interviewer using a hard-copy questionnaire.

#### **D. SITE SELECTION**

We chose to conduct the pretest in eight sites rather than selecting a nationwide probability sample, because it reduced the costs of in-person interviews and obtaining program records, while still providing sufficient information to thoroughly test the questionnaires and methods for identifying FSP-eligible nonparticipants. The eight sites were:

1. Suffolk County, Massachusetts (Boston)
2. Galveston, Texas
3. Adams County, Colorado (Denver)
4. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
5. Ramsey County, Minnesota (Minneapolis)
6. Durham, North Carolina
7. Bedford County, Pennsylvania
8. Murray, Lincoln, and Lyon Counties, Minnesota

Telephone interviews were conducted in all eight sites. In-person interviews were conducted in Galveston, Texas and Durham, North Carolina.

The sites were selected with a combination of random and purposive sampling. The sampling took place in two stages. In the first stage, we randomly selected six areas corresponding to the Census defined

metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) and primary metropolitan statistical areas (PMSAs). One area was selected from each of six of the seven FSP regions. We stratified the sampling to include at least two MSAs with Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) (Galveston and Raleigh<sup>7</sup>) and two large metropolitan areas (Philadelphia and Boston), two medium-sized metropolitan areas (Denver and Minneapolis), and two small-sized metropolitan areas (Galveston and Raleigh).

In the second stage, we randomly selected one urban county within each MSA/PMSA from counties that have 10 percent or more of their population in poverty. In one randomly selected MSA/PMSA--Philadelphia--we selected only from counties that also had 20 percent or more of their population over 60 years of age. To select the two rural sites, we first randomly selected two of the six study states--Pennsylvania and Minnesota. We chose the two rural sites in states that also contain an urban site to reduce the cost of collecting program-records data. We then randomly selected a rural county in the chosen state from a list of rural counties that have poverty rates of 10 percent or more. Because the selected counties in Philadelphia, Boston, and Galveston were large and contained many FSP offices, we selected an area within each county as our site.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, the population of Murray County was too small, so we expanded the definition of the site to include adjacent Lincoln and Lyon Counties.

## **E. BEHAVIORAL CODING AND INTERVIEWER COMMENTS**

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<sup>7</sup>Raleigh is the MSA that contains Durham.

<sup>8</sup>These areas were selected by asking the FSP agency for areas with a high concentration of working or elderly persons.



In most ways, the pretest was administered like a regular survey with a small sample size. However, we added two components to the survey to collect more information on the performance of the questionnaires.

First, the last section of the questionnaires included a set of debriefing questions for the interviewers. These questions asked the interviewers to record any questions that respondents complained about or found difficult to answer.

Second, we conducted behavioral coding on 40 of the completed interviews. These interviews were divided roughly equally among interviews using questionnaires of each type. Ten of the coded interviews were conducted in-person. The coding involved taping the interviews and then coding respondent and interviewer behaviors during the interview.

Respondent behaviors that were coded included: long pauses before answering; asking interviewers to repeat the question; objecting to the question; reluctance to answer the question; asking the interviewer to clarify the question; digressing when answering; or interrupting the reading of the question. While it is not necessarily a problem if some respondents exhibit some of these behaviors, if many respondents exhibit these behaviors, it usually indicates that there is a problem with the question. Similarly, if interviewers make wording changes, probe incorrectly, or do not follow the skip patterns, this may also indicate a problem with the questionnaire.

The coder also noted whether the interaction between the interviewer and respondent was low, medium, or high. A low interaction was coded if the interviewer just asked the question and the respondent gave an answer. The respondent may have paused or made a comment before answering, but did not ask the interviewer for clarification. A medium interaction was coded if the interviewer asked a question, the respondent asked for clarification or for the interviewer to repeat the question, the interviewer provided

clarification or repeated the question, and then the respondent answered the question. A high interaction was coded if the interviewer was required to repeat or clarify the question at least twice after the initial asking of the question. For example, the interviewer asked a question, the respondent asked a question, the interviewer replied, and then the respondent asked another question requiring a reply. A high interaction may indicate a problem with the question.

## **II. EXPERIENCES IDENTIFYING SURVEY RESPONDENTS**

A major challenge in conducting a survey of the reasons for FSP nonparticipation is to identify persons who are eligible for food stamps but are not receiving them. While the FSP agencies maintain lists of program participants, no lists exist of persons who are eligible for, but do not receive, food stamps. One of the main purposes of the pretest was to investigate whether it is feasible, at a reasonable cost, to identify eligible nonparticipants for the survey using random-digit-dialing (RDD) and a short screening interview. This chapter discusses our experience in identifying both eligible program nonparticipants and program participants using RDD. We also discuss our experience using lists of program participants to locate FSP participants eligible for the survey.

Two main criteria are used to assess our success in identifying persons eligible for the survey--the response rate to the screening interview and survey costs. A low response rate is a cause for concern because findings from the survey will be biased if persons who do respond to the interview differ fundamentally from those who do not respond in their reasons for nonparticipation, experiences with food stamps, or general attitudes. Cost is always a concern, especially so for a survey about nonparticipation for which the survey costs are likely to be high. In addition to these two criteria, we also examine how many respondents are determined eligible for food stamps by our RDD screening interview, but later in the main questionnaires report income, vehicles, and expenses that suggest that they are ineligible for food stamps.

The remainder of this chapter is organized into three sections. Section A discusses our experience identifying respondents using RDD. Section B discusses our experience identifying participants using a list-

frame. We summarize our main findings and discuss their implications for administering the survey on a national scale in Section C.

## **A. RDD SCREENING**

To identify persons who were eligible for food stamps but not participating in the FSP, we used list-assisted RDD sampling. It was “list-assisted” in that we purchased lists of telephone numbers in the chosen sites from a commercial vendor. The vendor creates a list of all possible telephone numbers in an area, including both those that are listed in the telephone directory and those that are not.

To decrease the number of business telephone numbers on the lists, the vendor removes all telephone numbers that are listed in the yellow pages but not the white pages of the telephone directory and restricts the sample to telephone numbers for which there is at least one known residential telephone number with the same eight first digits (including area code). However, even after these steps, the sample includes telephone numbers that are not in service and telephone numbers of businesses and other nonresidential organizations. So the survey interviewer’s first task when calling a telephone number is to determine whether the number is in service and belongs to a residence. If the telephone number is found to be working and it belongs to a residence, the screening interview is conducted to determine whether the respondent is eligible for a main questionnaire.

### **1. Response Rates**

The response rate to the RDD screening interview was about 60 percent. While this response rate is about the average for recent RDD telephone interviews, this rate is still a cause for concern. Nonresponse to a survey generates uncertainty about the validity of the survey’s findings. If nonresponse was completely random it would not be a problem. However, we generally do not know whether or not

it is random. If nonresponse varies with characteristics of interest, there will be *nonresponse bias*--the observed findings will differ from the findings that *would* have been observed if there had been no nonresponse.

The response rate to an RDD screening interview has two components: (1) the rate at which the interviewer can determine whether the telephone number belongs to a residence, and (2) the rate at which the respondent completes the screening interview. Table II.1 summarizes the components of the response rate.

#### **a. Determining Residential Status**

Interviewers called 16,648 different telephone numbers in the RDD sample. They determined whether the number worked and belonged to a residence for 13,870 numbers--a completion rate for determining residential status of 83 percent. Of these 13,870 numbers, 8,623 (62 percent) numbers belonged to residences and 5,247 (38 percent) numbers were either not working or belonged to businesses or other nonresidential organizations. The interviewers called each number up to 40 times on different days and at different times of the day before the number was “retired.” Even so, interviewers could not determine whether 2,778 telephone numbers belonged to a residence, mainly because no-one answered the telephone.

The completion rate for determining residential status varies considerably between RDD surveys, but it is typically over 90 percent. One explanation for the low completion rate for determining residential status in this study was that the field period for the RDD survey was only three months. MPR’s experience has shown that the completion rate can increase significantly if the field period is extended, allowing more attempts at obtaining an answer to a telephone call over a longer period of time.

TABLE II.1

## COMPLETION AND RESPONSE RATES TO THE RDD SCREENING INTERVIEW

Total Numbers Dialed	16,648
Residential Status Determined	13,870
Residential	8,623
Nonresidential	5,247
Residential Status Unknown <sup>a</sup>	2,778
Rate of Completing Determination of Residential Status <sup>b</sup>	83.3%
Residential Eligibility Rate <sup>c</sup>	62.2%
Eligible for Screening <sup>d</sup>	8,623
Eligibility Determined	6,155
Eligible for main questionnaire	576
Working nonparticipants <sup>e</sup>	355
Elderly nonparticipants <sup>e</sup>	191
Working participants <sup>e</sup>	54
Elderly participants <sup>e</sup>	48
Ineligible for main questionnaire	5,579
Eligibility Unknown	2,468
Hung-up during introduction	231
Refused after introduction	815
Refused during screening interview	1,282
Language or disability prevented completion of interview	140
Rate of Completing the Eligibility Screening Interview <sup>f</sup>	71.4%
Rate of Eligibility for Main Questionnaires <sup>g</sup>	9.4%
<b>Response Rate<sup>h</sup></b>	<b>59.5%</b>

TABLE II.1 (*Continued*)

NOTES:

<sup>a</sup> Cannot determine whether the telephone belongs to a residence. In most cases, the telephone was never answered.

<sup>b</sup> The number of telephone numbers for which residential status is determined as a percentage of the number of telephone numbers dialed.

<sup>c</sup> The number of telephone numbers which belong to a residence as a percentage of the number of telephone numbers for which the residential status is determined.

<sup>d</sup> Telephone numbers that belong to a residence.

<sup>e</sup> Eligible respondents who are in both working and elderly households are counted as both working and elderly. We identified 484 nonparticipants and 92 participants in total.

<sup>f</sup> The number of respondents who completed the screening interview as a percentage of the number of respondents eligible for screening.

<sup>g</sup> The number of respondents found eligible for the main questionnaires as a percentage of the number of respondents who completed the screening interview.

<sup>h</sup> The number of respondents who completed the screening interview as a percentage of the number of residential (both known and unknown) telephone numbers called. It is the product of the rate of completing the determination of residential status and the rate of completing the eligibility screening interview.

## **b. Determining Eligibility for the Survey**

After determining that the telephone number belonged to a residence, the interviewer conducted a short screening interview to determine whether the respondent was eligible for the survey. The interview was designed so that most people who were ineligible for the survey completed the interview after being asked only the first two questions. These questions asked about household size and whether household income was less than an amount equal to 130 percent of the poverty threshold (an amount dependent on the household's size.) If the respondent reported income of less than 130 percent of poverty, the interviewer then asked questions about whether the household contained either a working or an elderly person, food stamp receipt, whether the household had recently been determined ineligible for food stamps, whether everyone in the household received TANF, GA, or SSI, and questions about the household's assets. We count a screening interview as "complete" if the respondents answered sufficient questions for us to determine whether the person was eligible for the survey. We completed 6,155 screening interviews, 71 percent of the 8,623 telephone numbers that we determined belonged to residences.

The 2,458 persons who did not complete the screening interview can be divided into four broad groups (see Table II.1):

- 1. *Persons who hung-up the telephone during the introduction.*** Although the introduction consisted of only four short sentences, this group comprised 9 percent of all respondents who did not complete the screening interview and about 3 percent of all respondents eligible for screening.
- 2. *Persons who refused immediately after the introduction in the screening interview.*** A further 33 percent of all respondents who did not complete the screening interview (about 9 percent of all respondents) refused to answer any screening questions.
- 3. *Persons who refused during the screening interview.*** Fifty-two percent of persons who did not complete the screening interview (about 15 percent of all respondents) could not answer or refused to answer a specific question in the screening interview.



**4. *Persons who did not complete the screening interview because of language or disabilities.*** Screening interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.<sup>9</sup> About 6 percent of respondents who did not complete a screening interview (2 percent of all respondents) did not complete it because they spoke neither English nor Spanish or they were too ill or incoherent to respond to an interview.

Just over 40 percent of the respondents who did not complete the screening interview were not even asked the first question, suggesting that the length of the screening interview was not an important contributor to nonresponse.

To explore whether there were specific questions that discouraged persons from completing the RDD screening interview, we present a summary of the nonresponse to each question in Table II.2. If a respondent did not answer one of these questions, the screening interview was concluded after that question. With one exception, the questions are listed in the order they are asked on the screening interview. The exception is the question about whether the respondent had applied for food stamps within the past three years. This question was asked after the question about the receipt of food stamps but only of those respondents who received food stamps in the current or previous month. The second, third, and fourth columns present the percentage of respondents who did not respond to each question (either because they refused the question or because they said they did not know the answer) as a percentage of *all* respondents asked the question.<sup>10</sup> The last column presents the percentage of all respondents who did not respond to the question as a percent of all respondents who did not complete the screening interview.

A striking finding from Table II.2 is that nearly 10 percent of people who were asked the first question (about how many people lived in their household) refused to answer it. Nearly 57 percent

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<sup>9</sup>Just over 1 percent (103) of the RDD screening interviews were conducted in Spanish.

<sup>10</sup>The denominator includes respondents who did not respond to later questions.

TABLE II.2

## DISTRIBUTION OF POINTS AT WHICH THE RESPONDENT BROKE OFF THE RDD SCREENING INTERVIEW

Question <sup>a</sup>	Percentage of Respondents Who Did Not Respond to the Question			
	Of All Respondents Asked the Question			Of All Respondents Who Broke Off During the Screening Interview
	Refused	Don't Know	Total Nonresponse	Total Nonresponse
s1. How many people live in your household?	9.6	0.2	9.8	56.9
s1a/ab Is your income less than (130% of poverty)?	5.0	1.7	6.8	35.5
s2. Did you receive food stamps this month or last?	0.6	0.3	0.9	1.0
s4/5 Does anyone in your household work? <sup>b</sup> Is anyone in your household over age 60? <sup>b</sup>	0.8	0	0.8	0.8
s7. Does anyone in your household own a vehicle?	0.5	0.2	0.7	0.5
s8. Was the vehicle manufactured in the previous 5 years?	0.5	0.7	1.2	0.5
s13. Is your cash and money in checking and savings accounts less than (\$2,000/\$3,000)?	5.2	2.3	7.5	3.8
s14. Do you have any other assets?	0.7	0.7	1.4	0.5
s15. Are these other assets less than (\$2,000/\$3,000)?	0	4.6	4.6	0.2
s16. Is the value of all your assets less than (\$2,000/\$3,000)?	0	0	0	0
s19a. Did you apply within the previous three years?	0.9	2.6	3.5	0.9
Total number of respondents who began the screening interview	-	-	7,437	-
Total number of respondents who broke off during the screening interview	-	-	-	1,282

## NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>The questions have been paraphrased for brevity.

<sup>b</sup>The screening interview is considered incomplete if the respondent did not respond to both the question of whether the household contains a working person and the question about whether the household contains an elderly person. The question numbers for participants are s23 and s24.

of all persons who began the interview but did not complete it, refused to answer the first question. Including persons who refused before or during the introduction, over 70 percent of all persons who did not complete the screening interview refused before the interviewer asked the second question.

The second question asked whether the respondent's household income was less than an amount approximately equal to 130 percent of poverty for the respondent's household size.<sup>11</sup> Even though this is a sensitive question and asked early in the interview, only about 5 percent of persons asked the question refused and just less than 2 percent of persons said they did not know the answer. Nonresponse to this question accounts for about 36 percent of all persons who began the screening interview but did not complete it. Persons who did not answer the first two questions account for 92 percent of the persons who were asked the first question but did not complete the screening interview.

In an attempt to decrease nonresponse to the income question, one week into the pretest survey we added an interviewer probe to the income question. If a respondent either answered "don't know" or refused to answer the income question, the interviewer said to the respondent ***"We do not need to know your income, we only need to know if your income is below a certain amount. Your response will be kept confidential"*** and then repeated the income question to the respondent. This probe was successful in reducing nonresponse to the question. Of the 444 times the probe was used, the respondent answered the income question after the probe (after initially refusing to answer the question) 77 times--a rate of converting refusals of 17 percent.

As expected, the questions about assets also proved to be sensitive and difficult. The RDD screening interview included four questions about respondents' assets: (1) whether the respondent's liquid assets

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<sup>11</sup>The CATI system automatically selected the appropriate income threshold for the reported household size. The income threshold was rounded to the nearest fifty dollars so that it would not give the impression that the respondent needed to know the exact amount of his or her household income.

(cash and resources in checking and savings accounts) exceeded the asset threshold for FSP eligibility,<sup>12</sup> (2) whether the respondent had any other assets, (3) whether the amount of these other assets exceeded the asset threshold for FSP eligibility, and (4) whether the liquid assets and other assets together exceeded the asset threshold for FSP eligibility.

Of the persons asked the first asset question, over 5 percent refused to answer the question and over 2 percent did not know the answer. Of respondents asked this question, a higher proportion of persons refused to answer it than refused to answer the income questions. The nonresponse to the second asset question was very low. The third asset question--whether the amount of other assets exceeded the asset threshold for FSP eligibility--caused some difficulties. While no-one in the pretest refused to answer the question, nearly 5 percent of those asked did not know the answer to the question. This reflects the difficulty of the question. All the persons asked the fourth question responded to the question.

Despite relatively high nonresponse rates to the asset questions, only 4.5 percent of all people who broke off during the screening interview did so because of these questions. This is because the questions were asked later in the interview when many respondents had either already been found ineligible for the survey or had refused to answer a prior question.

The question about whether the respondent last applied for food stamps within the previous three years, asked of participants, also proved somewhat problematic. Although less than 1 percent of persons asked this question refused to answer it, nearly 3 percent could not answer it. This is a difficult question for respondents to answer--they need to think back over a period of several years; and while for program administrators an "application" is a well-defined term, it may be a confusing term to food stamp recipients.

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<sup>12</sup>The CATI system automatically selected the appropriate threshold based on whether the household contained an elderly person.

The date the respondent last applied for food stamps can be easily confused with the date the respondent first applied for food stamps or the date the respondent last recertified.

The other questions in the screening interview had low rates of item nonresponse. Respondents did not have any difficulties answering questions about whether they received food stamps, whether their household included a working or an elderly person, whether they owned a vehicle, or whether the vehicle was manufactured in the previous five years.

### **c. Overall Response Rates**

The overall response rate to the screening interview was just under 60 percent. Following the recommendation of the Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO 1982), the response rate was calculated as the number of completed screening interviews as a percent of the number of residential units, both known and unknown. The number of unknown residential units was estimated by assuming that the proportion of residential telephone numbers among telephone numbers in which the residential status was unknown is the same as the proportion of residential telephone numbers among telephone number for which the residential status was known. Using this estimate, the overall response rate is equal to the product of the completion rate for determining residential status and the completion rate for determining eligibility for the main questionnaire.

Response rates for RDD interviews are typically low. In a review of 39 RDD surveys, Massey, O'Connor, and Krotki (1997) found that the average response rate was 62 percent. About one-half of the surveys had response rates between 60 and 70 percent. One-third of the surveys had response rates below 60 percent. Only about one-sixth of the surveys had response rates above 70 percent. The response rate to the pretest screening interview is in the same range as found in previous RDD surveys, even though it asks difficult and sensitive questions.

Both the completion and response rates varied by site, as illustrated in Table II.3. The response rate varied from just under 50 percent in Boston to just over 70 percent in the rural county in Minnesota. Both the completion rate for determining residential status and the completion rate to the interview were lowest in the big city sites of Boston and Philadelphia, and highest in the rural site in Minnesota. Low response rates in large metropolitan areas, especially in the Northeast of the United States, have been found in other studies (Cohen and Carlson 1992 and Kristal et al. 1993). If we exclude respondents from Boston and Philadelphia from our sample, the response rate to the pretest increases nearly three percentage points to over 62 percent.

## **2. Resource Requirements for Identifying Respondents Using RDD**

An important factor in designing any survey is its cost. Because households that are eligible for food stamps are not common, an RDD survey requires many phone calls to identify FSP-eligible households. The focus on working and elderly households adds to the difficulty of finding respondents eligible for the survey. This section begins with a discussion of the rate at which we found respondents eligible for the main questionnaires, and then discusses the reasons we found respondents ineligible for the main questionnaires. We conclude the section with a discussion of the amount of time spent by interviewers on RDD screening.

### **a. Rate at Which We Found Respondents Eligible for the Survey**

The most important determinant of the cost of the RDD screening interview is the number of calls that need to be made to identify the target number of respondents. One of the main determinants of this is the *eligibility rate*--the number of respondents that we find are eligible for the survey as a percent of the number of respondents who completed a screening interview. The eligibility rates are presented in Table II.4, separately by site and by working nonparticipants, elderly

TABLE II.3  
COMPLETION AND RESPONSE RATES TO THE  
RDD SCREENING INTERVIEW, BY SITE

Site	Completion Rate for Identifying Residential Status <sup>a</sup>	Completion Rate for Determining Eligibility for Main Questionnaires <sup>b</sup>	Response Rate to RDD Screening Interview <sup>c</sup>
<b>Urban</b>			
Suffolk, MA (Boston)	73.6	67.5	49.7
Galveston, TX	84.4	71.8	60.6
Adams, CO (Denver)	85.8	71.6	61.4
Philadelphia, PA	80.5	67.8	54.6
Ramsey, MN (Minneapolis)	84.4	74.8	63.1
Durham, NC	85.2	71.2	60.6
<b>Rural</b>			
Bedford, PA	89.4	74.0	66.2
Murray, MN	90.9	77.6	70.6
<b>All</b>	<b>83.3</b>	<b>71.4</b>	<b>59.5</b>

NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>The number of telephone numbers for which residential status is determined as a percentage of the number of telephone numbers dialed.

<sup>b</sup>The number of respondents who completed the screening interview as a percentage of the number of respondents eligible for screening.

<sup>c</sup>The number of respondents who completed the screening interview as a percentage of the number of residential (both known and unknown) telephone numbers called.

TABLE II.4

RATE AT WHICH RESPONDENTS TO THE RDD SCREENING INTERVIEW  
WERE FOUND TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE MAIN QUESTIONNAIRES, BY SITE

Site	Percent in Poverty	Percent Elderly	Nonparticipants			Participants			Total
			Working	Elderly	All <sup>a</sup>	Working	Elderly	All <sup>a</sup>	
Urban									
Suffolk, MA (Boston)	18	16	3.6	2.3	5.8	0.5	0.5	0.9	6.7
Galveston, TX	16	15	7.1	3.5	9.4	0.8	0.8	1.3	10.7
Adams, CO (Denver)	10	11	5.6	2.3	7.1	0.6	0.4	0.9	8.1
Philadelphia, PA	20	20	10.1	4.5	12.9	2.2	1.7	3.7	16.6
Ramsey, MN (Minneapolis)	11	16	5.5	4.2	8.6	0.8	0.8	1.3	9.9
Durham, NC	12	14	4.2	2.8	6.0	0.6	0.8	1.3	7.3
Rural									
Bedford, PA	14	21	6.4	4.8	10.0	0.4	0	0.4	10.4
Murray, MN	14	26	5.5	4.2	8.6	0.8	0.8	1.2	9.9
All	13 <sup>b</sup>	17 <sup>b</sup>	5.5	3.1	7.9	0.9	0.8	1.5	9.4

NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>The rate for all nonparticipants/participants is not equal to the sum of the rates for the working and elderly because some households contain both a working and an elderly person.

<sup>b</sup> The national rate for the U.S.



nonparticipants, working participants, and elderly participants. As some households (about 12.5 percent) contain both working and elderly persons, the sum of the eligibility rates for working nonparticipants (or participants) and elderly nonparticipants (or participants) exceeds the overall eligibility rate for identifying respondents in either working or elderly households.<sup>13</sup>

Overall, we found 576 persons eligible for one of the main questionnaires out of 6,155 persons who completed the screening interview--an eligibility rate of 9.4 percent. Of the persons who completed the screening interview, we found 6.6 percent who met our criteria for the working questionnaires and 3.9 percent who met our criteria for the elderly questionnaires.<sup>14</sup>

Estimates using survey data from the 1994 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) suggest that just over 5 percent of U.S. households are eligible for the FSP and contain a person who works, and just less than 5 percent of U.S. households are eligible for the FSP and contain an elderly person (Stavrianos 1997). Our findings on the prevalence of FSP-eligible working and elderly households are similar.

We were surprised by the relatively high number of nonparticipants we found for each participant. For every 100 people who completed the screening interview, we identified 7.9 FSP-eligible nonparticipants (in either working or elderly households) and 1.5 participants (in either working or elderly households). We found more than five nonparticipants for every participant, about six times as many working nonparticipants for every one working participant, and about four elderly nonparticipants for every

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<sup>13</sup>If we found that a household contained an elderly and a working person, we only administered one questionnaire to the household. The CATI system determined randomly whether the respondent was administered a working or an elderly questionnaire.

<sup>14</sup>The sum of these two percentages exceeds 9.4 percent because a respondent could be eligible for both a working and an elderly questionnaire.

one elderly participant. Stavrianos (1997) estimated that in 1994 there was just over one working nonparticipant for every one working participant and just under two elderly nonparticipants for every one elderly participant.

There are four possible explanations for the discrepancy between our findings and the findings in Stavrianos (1997). First, we screened out any participant who said that they last applied for food stamps more than three years ago. As we show later, our findings suggest that without this screen we would increase the number of participants that we identified by about 82 percent.

Second, the earlier study used data from 1994 while our findings are based on information collected at the beginning of 1998. Since welfare reform there has been a decrease in participation in many welfare programs, including the FSP, that cannot be explained by the decrease in poverty rates (which are usually good measures of FSP eligibility rates). This would suggest a decrease in the FSP participation rate.

Third, respondents may have stated in the screening interview that they do not receive food stamps when in fact they do. FSP participation is typically underreported in survey data. Comparisons of FSP operations data and 1992 SIPP data suggest that FSP participation is underreported by about 22 percent in the SIPP (Trippe and Sykes 1994). For this reason, Stavrianos used estimates of the number of FSP participants from FSP operations data rather than the SIPP. If this explanation is true, this would cause some concern because it suggests that some of the persons we believe are nonparticipants are in fact participants. We do not think this is a serious concern, as no respondent to a main nonparticipant questionnaire later revealed that they were in fact a participant when asked about the reasons for their nonparticipation.

Fourth, it is possible that the response rate to an RDD screening interview is lower for participants than for nonparticipants.<sup>15</sup> As most persons who did not complete the interview had broken off by the time we asked about participation, we cannot tell whether the response rate differed between participants and nonparticipants. (Although we do know the completion rate to the main questionnaire was *higher* for participants.) If the response rates do differ between participants and nonparticipants, this would be a concern as it suggests differences in the rate of response that depend on factors related to the decision to participate.

The eligibility rate varied by site from less than 7 percent in Boston to about 17 percent in Philadelphia. The differences in the eligibility rate reflect differences in poverty rates and the percent elderly in the survey sites. Sites with high poverty rates and/or large elderly populations, such as Philadelphia, Bedford, and Murray, have high eligibility rates. Sites with low poverty rates and smaller elderly populations, such as Ramsey (Minneapolis), have lower eligibility rates. However, the poverty rates and the percent of the population who are elderly do not explain all the differences--we found higher rates of eligibility in Galveston than in Boston, despite Boston having a high poverty rate and a higher prevalence of elderly persons than Galveston.

It is important to remember that the sites were selected only from counties which had poverty rates of 10 percent or higher, and Philadelphia and Murray were selected only from counties which also had 20 percent or more of the population over age 60. In nationally-representative sites, we would expect the eligibility rates to be lower. Based on an average of the eligibility rates in the four sites with lower rates of

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<sup>15</sup>This explanation is also consistent with the underreporting of FSP participation found in the SIPP.

poverty and less elderly populations,<sup>16</sup> we would expect the eligibility rate for a nationally-representative sample to be around 9 percent.

**b. Reasons Respondents Were Found Ineligible for the Survey**

The reasons respondents were found ineligible for the survey are presented in Table II.5. The reasons are listed in the order they are used in the screening interview to screen out respondents. All respondents are first asked about the size of their household and whether their household income exceeds 130 percent of poverty. Respondents who report household income below that level and that they do not receive food stamps need to satisfy six additional screening criteria to be eligible for the main questionnaires:

1. No-one in the household can have been informed that he or she was ineligible for food stamps in either the current or previous month
2. The household must contain either a working or elderly person
3. The household must not own a vehicle that was manufactured in the past five years
4. The household's cash and assets in checking and savings accounts must not exceed the FSP eligibility threshold
5. Other household assets must not exceed the FSP eligibility threshold
6. The value of all household assets must not exceed the FSP eligibility threshold

The last four screening criteria are not applied if everyone in the respondent's household receives TANF, GA, SSI, or other welfare benefits because the household is considered categorically eligible for food stamps. Two additional screens are applied to participants: (1) they must have applied within the last three

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<sup>16</sup>These sites are Galveston (Texas), Adams (Colorado), Ramsey (Minnesota), and Durham (North Carolina).

TABLE II.5

REASONS RESPONDENTS TO THE RDD SCREENING INTERVIEW WERE FOUND INELIGIBLE  
FOR THE MAIN QUESTIONNAIRES

Reason	Number of Respondents <sup>a</sup>		Number of Respondents Found Ineligible For Each Reason as Percent of:	
	Found Ineligible for Reason	Who Answered the Questions	All Respondents Who Were Found Ineligible	All Respondents Who Answered the Question
Income exceeds 130% of poverty	4,716	6,155	84.5	76.6
<b>Nonparticipants</b>				
Had recently been informed that they were ineligible for food stamps	32	1,095	0.6	2.9
Neither a working nor an elderly person in the household	207	1,063	3.7	20.2
Owned vehicle less than 5 years old <sup>b</sup>	194	856	3.5	22.7
Cash and assets in checking and savings accounts exceeded limit <sup>b</sup>	142	662	2.5	21.5
Other nonliquid assets exceeded limit <sup>b</sup>	29	520	0.5	5.6
Total assets exceeded limit <sup>b</sup>	7	491	0.1	1.4
Passed all screens	-	484	-	-

TABLE II.5 (Continued)

Reason	Number of Respondents <sup>a</sup>		Number of Respondents Found Ineligible For Each Reason as Percent of:	
	Found Ineligible for Reason	Who Answered the Questions	All Respondents Who Were Found Ineligible	All Respondents Who Answered the Question
<b>Participants</b>				
Last applied more than three years previously	155	344	2.8	45.1
Inconsistent response to question about when they last received food stamps <sup>c</sup>	9	189	0.2	4.8
Neither a working nor an elderly person in the household	88	180	1.6	48.9
Passed all screens	-	92	-	92
Total Number Of Respondents Who Completed a Screening Interview	-	6,155	-	6,155
Total Number of Respondents Found Ineligible	5,579	-	5,579	-

## NOTES:

<sup>a</sup> Only includes respondents who completed the screening interview.

<sup>b</sup> This question is skipped if the respondent reports that everyone in the household receives TANF, GA, or SSI.

<sup>c</sup> Persons responded that they had received food stamps this month or last to question s2 but then responded that they had received last food stamps more than one month ago when asked when they had last received food stamps in question s19.

years, and (2) the household must contain either a working or an elderly person. As soon as a respondent indicates that they are not eligible by not “passing a screen” the interviewer ends the interview by thanking the respondent for his or her time.

For most respondents, a household income above the FSP eligibility threshold was the reason they were found ineligible for the main questionnaire. About 85 percent of all ineligible respondents were ineligible because their income was too high, and 77 percent of respondents who were asked about their income reported that their income exceeded 130 percent of poverty.

The question about whether the household contained a working or elderly person screened out about 20 percent of the nonparticipant households and nearly 49 percent of the participant households.

The asset questions also screened out quite a large number of nonparticipant households. If we had not asked the asset questions, the main questionnaires would have been administered to 856 nonparticipants, nearly twice the number of nonparticipants (484) who actually passed all the screens. Many nonparticipants who were in fact ineligible would have been administered the main questionnaires if we had not included the asset screens. Table II.6 presents the number of nonparticipants who did not pass the asset screens, broken down by whether the respondent is working or elderly. Although the differences are not large, respondents from working households were more likely than respondents from elderly households to fail the vehicle test and respondents from elderly households were more likely than the ones from working households to have cash or other assets that exceeded the threshold.

About 45 percent of participants said that they had not applied for food stamps in the previous three years and so were screened out. If this question had not been used as a screen, we estimate that we would have identified 167 participants for the main questionnaire, about 82 percent more than

TABLE II.6

## FAILURE TO PASS ASSET SCREENS IN RDD INTERVIEW, BY TYPE OF RESPONDENT

Reason	Working <sup>a</sup>			Elderly <sup>b</sup>		
	Number of Respondents		Percent of Respondents	Number of Respondents		Percent of Respondents
	Who Were Found Ineligible for Reason	Who Passed Previous Screens	Who Passed Previous Screens Found Ineligible for Reason	Who Were Found Ineligible for Reason	Who Passed Previous Screens	Who Passed Previous Screens Found Ineligible for Reason
Owned vehicle less than five years old	157	635	24.7	65	327	19.9
Cash and assets in checking and savings accounts exceeded limit	96	478	20.1	58	262	22.1
Other nonliquid assets exceeded limit	21	382	5.5	12	204	5.9
Total assets exceeded limit	6	361	1.7	1	192	0.5

## NOTES:

<sup>a</sup> Respondents in a household that contains a working person. The household may also contain an elderly person.

<sup>b</sup> Respondents in a household that contains an elderly person. The household may also contain a working person.



the 92 that we actually identified. We used this question as a screen because the survey asks participants about their experiences applying for food stamps and we did not want to include participants who last applied many years ago. Despite the relatively high nonresponse to this question (see Table II.3), the proportion of pretest participants screened out because they applied within three years (55 percent) is the same as the proportion of FSP participants that applied within the last three years in a cross-sectional sample of FSP participants in the 1991 SIPP (Gleason, Schochet, and Moffitt 1998).

Another screen for the participants merits some discussion. We asked persons who said they received food stamps, when they last received food stamps and the amount they received. Nine respondents said they last received food stamps more than two months previously. As this directly contradicts the response that these persons gave earlier in the screening interview that they had received food stamps in the current or previous month, we treated these respondents as ineligible for the survey.

### **c. Interviewer Time Spent on RDD Screening**

The most important determinant of the cost of a survey is the number of hours spent by the telephone interviewers on the screening. The amount of time spent by interviewers on RDD screening during the pretest is shown in Table II.7. Time spent screening includes all time spent by telephone interviewers conducting the screening.<sup>17</sup> This includes time spent logging on to the CATI system, calling numbers, determining whether the number belongs to a residence, talking with supervisors, and time between calls. Table II.7 also presents the average number of times each telephone number was called during the pretest.

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<sup>17</sup>The estimates were made using electronic records of the length of time interviewers spent logged on to the RDD CATI program, electronic records of the length of time interviewers spent logged on to the list-frame CATI program, interviewer-recorded time spent administering the main questionnaires, and records of hours worked from the interviewers' time-sheets.

A total of 46 telephone interviewers<sup>18</sup> spent 3,347 hours identifying the 576 persons eligible for the main questionnaires--about 5.8 hours for each eligible respondent. Each telephone number was called between 1 and 40 times. On average, each number was called 5.4 times. The interviewers spent an average of 12 minutes per telephone number on screening.

Most of the interviewers' time was spent *not* on conducting interviews, but on dialing numbers, determining residential status, and attempting to persuade the respondents to complete the interview. The RDD screening interview took on average less than four minutes.

The amount of interview time required to identify respondents using RDD is driven by the amount of time it takes to identify the type of respondent that is least prevalent in the population. The additional cost of identifying other types of respondents that are more prevalent in the population is negligible because types of respondents with a higher prevalence are identified in the course of screening for the target population with the lowest prevalence. For example, because elderly nonparticipants are less prevalent than working nonparticipants, the amount of time required to identify 1,000 elderly nonparticipants and 1,000 working nonparticipants will not be much more than the amount of time it takes to find 1,000 elderly nonparticipants and no working nonparticipants.

Table II.8 illustrates how many telephone numbers would need to be called to identify 100 respondents of each type and how much interviewer time it would take to screen each eligible respondent. These estimates are based on the assumptions that the response rate for each type of

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<sup>18</sup>Not all of the interviewers worked throughout the pretest. As is typical, there was some attrition of the interviewers and in later stages of the pretest we used only the more productive interviewers.

TABLE II.7

NUMBERS CALLED, TIMES EACH NUMBER DIALED, AND TIME SPENT ON  
INTERVIEWING: RDD SCREENING

Telephone numbers called	16,648
Average times number was dialed	5.4
Total time spent on screening (hours) <sup>a</sup>	3,347
Average time spent screening per number called (minutes)	12
Average time spent screening per eligible respondent (hours)	5.8

NOTE:

<sup>a</sup>Includes all time spent by telephone interviewers on RDD screening. This includes time spent logging into the CATI system, calling numbers, determining residential status, talking with supervisors, and time between calls.

TABLE II.8  
ESTIMATES OF RESOURCES REQUIRED TO IDENTIFY SURVEY  
RESPONDENTS USING RDD

Respondent Group	With Pretest Eligibility Rate <sup>a</sup>		With Eligibility Rate Expected With Nationally-Representative Sites <sup>b</sup>	
	Numbers Called to Identify 100 Eligible Respondents	Average Time Spent Screening Per Eligible Respondent (Hours)	Numbers Called to Identify 100 Eligible Respondents	Average Time Spent Screening Per Eligible Respondent (Hours)
Working nonparticipants	4,690	9.4	4,896	9.8
Elderly nonparticipants	8,716	17.5	9,100	18.3
Working participants	30,830	61.9	32,187	64.7
Elderly participants	34,683	69.7	36,209	72.8

NOTES:

<sup>a</sup> In the pretest we found that 9.4 percent of respondents who completed the RDD screening interview were eligible for the survey.

<sup>b</sup> We expect that with nationally-representative sites, only about 9.0 percent of respondents who complete the RDD screening interview would be eligible for the survey. This increases the number of calls that need to be made by 4.4 percent ( $9.4/9.0 = 1.044$ ).

respondent is the same, and the amount of time spent calling each telephone number is the same as it was in the pretest. The estimates presented in the second and third columns are based on the rate at which we found persons eligible for the survey in the pretest. However, a survey to obtain a nationally-representative sample could not be limited, as the pretest was, to sites that do *not* have low poverty rates or small elderly populations. So we present in the fourth and fifth columns the number of calls needed and the time it would take to make the calls based on an estimate of the eligibility rate in nationally-representative sites. We estimate that we would need to call 4.4 percent more telephone numbers in nationally-representative sites than we did in the pretest to identify the same number of respondents.<sup>19</sup>

Because of the nature of an RDD survey, the amount of time required to identify *one* type of respondent is higher than the cost of identifying either a working nonparticipant *or* an elderly nonparticipant *or* a working participant *or* an elderly participant as we did in the pretest (see Table II.7). We estimate that it would take an average of nearly 10 hours of interviewer time to identify one working nonparticipant and over 18 hours of interviewer time to identify one elderly nonparticipant in a nationally-representative survey. To identify 1,000 working nonparticipants and 1,000 elderly nonparticipants for a national survey would require interviewers to spend about the same time as it would take to identify 1,000 elderly nonparticipants--18,300 hours.

Participants from either working or elderly households are difficult to identify using RDD. Table II.8 shows that it takes an enormous number of hours to identify a participant from either a working or an elderly household. Hence, it would not be efficient to identify participants using RDD unless it was in the course of identifying nonparticipants. Based on our pretest findings, we estimate that we would identify 15

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<sup>19</sup>In the pretest, the eligibility rate was 9.4 percent. We estimate that in nationally-representative sites the eligibility rate would be 9.0 percent.

working participants in the course of identifying 100 working nonparticipants (a ratio of participants to nonparticipants of 1 to 6.6) and we would identify 25 elderly participants in the course of identifying 100 elderly nonparticipants (a ratio of participants to nonparticipants of 1 to 4.0).

### **3. Further Eligibility Tests for Respondents Who Pass the RDD Screening Interview**

An important purpose of the RDD screening interview was to identify respondents who were likely to be eligible for food stamps. How well did it do? We cannot determine for sure whether respondents who passed the tests in the screening interview are FSP-eligible. To do so would require a respondent to submit to the full FSP application process.<sup>20</sup> However, the long nonparticipant questionnaires did ask for detailed information about income, expenses, vehicles, and U.S. citizenship, information that can be used to make a more accurate determination of eligibility than was made in the screening interview.<sup>21</sup>

To check the FSP-eligibility of nonparticipants in our sample, we divided the 165 respondents who were administered long nonparticipant questionnaires into three groups: (1) respondents in households with no elderly or disabled persons, (2) respondents in households with disabled persons and no elderly persons, and (3) respondents in households with elderly persons.<sup>22</sup> The FSP eligibility rules differ slightly for each of these groups.

Using the data from the long questionnaires, we applied four FSP-eligibility tests to the nonparticipant respondents.

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<sup>20</sup>We also have no information on whether the screening interview screened out respondents who were FSP-eligible.

<sup>21</sup>The long questionnaires did not ask about the amount of the household's financial assets. These questions were viewed as too difficult and sensitive.

<sup>22</sup>Four of the respondents in the third group were administered a working questionnaire because their households contained a working and an elderly person.

- C ***Was their total household income less than 130 percent of poverty?*** This test applies only to respondents from nonelderly nondisabled households. This test was also applied in the screening interview. However, in the main questionnaire, respondents are asked to provide data on their income by source, with the interviewer naming each potential source. This is likely to lead to less underreporting of income than when respondents are just asked about their total household income, without any probing about sources.
  
- C ***Was their net household income less than 100 percent of poverty?*** This net income test is applied to all households that apply for food stamps. Net income is total household income minus six deductions: (1) a standard deduction of \$134, (2) an earnings deduction of 20 percent of earned income, (3) out-of-pocket costs of dependent care up to a maximum per month, (4) medical expenses of elderly or disabled persons that exceed \$35 per person, (5) legally-owed child support payments made by a noncustodial parent of a child living outside the household, and (6) shelter costs in excess of 50 percent of remaining gross income after applying all other deductions, subject to a cap of \$250 for nonelderly nondisabled households.
  
- C ***Was the countable value of household vehicles greater than the asset limit?*** The FSP eligibility criterion is that countable household assets must not exceed \$2,000, unless the household is elderly and then they must not exceed \$3,000. The value of vehicles is often a large component of the assets of low-income households (McConnell 1997). The FSP counts assets in a household's first vehicle and vehicles used to commute to work as the fair market value of the vehicle in excess of \$4,650. They count assets in other vehicles as either the fair market value in excess of \$4,650 or the equity in the vehicle, whichever is larger. Using the pretest data we check whether the total value of a household's vehicles minus \$4,650 exceeds the appropriate FSP asset limit.
  
- C ***Is there any U.S. citizen in the household?*** With some exceptions, only U.S. citizens are eligible for food stamps. Using our pretest data, we check whether everyone in the household is a U.S. citizen.

The numbers of nonparticipant respondents to the long questionnaires who do not pass each of these tests are presented in Table II.9. Out of 165 respondents, 63 or about 38 percent failed one or more of the four tests using the data in the main questionnaires. So, a significant proportion of the nonparticipants in our sample may not be eligible for food stamps.

TABLE II.9

NUMBER OF NONPARTICIPANT RESPONDENTS WHO PASSED THE RDD SCREENING INTERVIEW BUT SEEM TO BE INELIGIBLE BASED ON INFORMATION GIVEN IN THE MAIN QUESTIONNAIRES

Failed Eligibility Test	Nonelderly Nondisabled Households	Nonelderly Disabled Households	Elderly Households	All Households
Gross income test	36	-- <sup>a</sup>	-- <sup>a</sup>	36
Net income test	24	4	17	45
Value of the household vehicles minus \$4,650 exceeds countable asset threshold	3	-- <sup>b</sup>	2	5
No U.S. citizen in household	5	1	0	6
Failed at least one of the eligibility tests <sup>c</sup>	41	5	17	63
<b>Sample size</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>165</b>

NOTES:

<sup>a</sup> Elderly and disabled households are not subject to the gross income eligibility test.

<sup>b</sup> Vehicles used to transport disabled persons are not countable assets. Hence, we did not subject disabled households to the vehicle test.

<sup>c</sup> This is not the column total because households may fail more than one test.



We found that disabled and elderly households were less likely to be found ineligible with the additional information than households with earnings. We found that out of 73 respondents from households without elderly or disabled persons 36 (49 percent) failed the gross income test based on income reported later in the main questionnaire. Of these, 30 respondents failed because their earnings exceeded 130 percent of poverty. These respondents reported gross household income less than 130 percent of poverty at the beginning of the interview but then later in the interview reported a wage rate and hours worked inconsistent with that low a household income.

It may be that the earnings reported in the main questionnaires do not reflect the household earnings for that month. The respondent was asked for the “usual” number of weekly hours worked and the “usual” hourly wage rate for workers in the household. But it could be that the workers in the household had not worked the “usual” number of hours that month. We also found that 19 percent of participants, who presumably are FSP-eligible, reported earnings and other income in the main questionnaire that exceeded 130 percent of poverty. This would be consistent with this explanation for the discrepancy.<sup>23</sup>

Another explanation for the discrepancy is that respondents either misreported their aggregate household income in the screening interview or missreported their earnings in the main questionnaires. Previous studies have found that income is more likely to be underreported when the question asks for aggregate income rather than income by source (Citro and Michael 1995).

The net income test failed the most respondents, mainly because this test was applicable to all respondents. We did not include questions to calculate any FSP deductions in the screening interview because to apply the net income test would require too many detailed and sensitive questions to include in a screening interview. Few respondents had countable vehicle assets more than the threshold, suggesting

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<sup>23</sup>In Chapter III, we recommend modifying the questions about earnings in the main questionnaires.

that the cutoff for the age of the vehicles used in the screening interview worked well. Few respondents were in households that contained no U.S. citizens. This may, however, differ if the survey was administered in other areas of the country, such as California or New York.

## **B. LIST-FRAME SCREENING**

While lists of persons who are eligible for food stamps but choose not to receive them are not available, the Food Stamp Program does maintain electronic lists of FSP participants. These lists can be used as a sample frame for a survey. For the survey pretest, we used both the program lists and RDD to identify working and elderly participants for the survey.

We asked the six states participating in the study to provide lists of names, addresses, and telephone numbers of current FSP participants who had last applied for food stamps within the previous three years and who were in households with earnings or households that contained an elderly person. All states keep some electronic data of current FSP participants as part of their administrative systems for issuing benefits. Most states keep these data at the state level and can send the data on computer tape or disk.<sup>24</sup> We found that states could send us lists of FSP participants with an indicator for which households were elderly. However, some states did not have data readily available on whether the household had earnings and so sent us lists of participants who were in elderly households and lists of participants in nonelderly households. All the states had difficulty providing us with the date the participant last applied. Hence, our sample frame included some households that did not contain either a working or elderly person and FSP participants whose most recent application for food stamps was more than three years ago.

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<sup>24</sup>Some states in which the FSP is county-administered may keep their data at the county level.

The states provided us with data on the names of the participants, their addresses, telephone numbers (when they were available), and the names of their caseworkers. After sampling participants from these lists, we sent lists of the names of the participants to the local FSP offices for the caseworkers to check whether we had the most recent telephone number and address. Once these were checked, we then mailed each FSP participant with a working telephone a letter describing the study and informing the participant that we would be calling them shortly to interview them.

Obtaining the data from the state agencies and the corrected telephone numbers from the local offices took considerable time. We approached the state agencies to request the data in August 1997, requesting data on persons who were receiving food stamps in September or October. We received the first set of data in November. However, we had still not received all the data in January 1998 when the RDD survey began. The local offices needed two or three weeks to provide us with updated lists of telephone numbers. These delays meant we could not begin the list-frame survey until mid-February. Hence, even at the beginning of the pretest of the list-frame screening, our lists were four or five months out of date. By April, at the end of the pretest, the data were six or seven months out of date.

This section discusses our experience in using the list-frame to identify FSP participants for the survey pretest. We compare it with the RDD survey in terms of both response rates and interviewer time spent on the survey.

## **1. Response Rates**

The response rate to the list-frame screening interview was similar to the response rate to the RDD screening interview. Table II.10 summarizes the number of completes at each stage of the screening. We dialed 253 different telephone numbers and were able to locate the participant and complete an interview for 151 of these numbers--a response rate of 60 percent.

The completion and response rates to the list-frame screening interview for each site are presented in Table II.11. As for the RDD screening interview, we found the response rates were highest in the rural sites and lowest in the urban sites.

### **a. Locating Respondents**

The main reason for nonresponse was the difficulty in locating respondents. The respondent was not reached at the listed telephone number in 79 of the 253 cases (31 percent). This was mostly because when we called the number the telephone had been disconnected or reassigned to a person who was not the respondent. We called directory assistance to find numbers, but were successful in only a few cases.

### **b. Determining Eligibility for the Survey**

The completion rate for the screening interview was high--nearly 87 percent--much higher than the completion rate for the RDD screening interview (71 percent). We attribute this high completion rate to three factors. First, participants are more likely to be interested in a survey about the FSP than nonparticipants. Second, an advance letter was sent to each respondent before the interview. Surveys that use advance letters are generally able to achieve higher response rates than those who do not (Brunner and Carroll 1969; Dillman, Gallegos, and Frey 1976; and Traugott,

TABLE II.10  
COMPLETION AND RESPONSE RATES TO THE  
LIST-FRAME SCREENING INTERVIEW

Total Numbers Dialed	253
Respondents Located	174
Respondents Not Located <sup>a</sup>	79
Rate of Locating Respondents <sup>b</sup>	68.8%
Respondents Located	174
Eligibility Determined	151
Eligible for main questionnaire	86
Working participants	38
Elderly participants	48
Ineligible for main questionnaire	65
Eligibility Unknown	23
Hung-up during introduction	0
Refused after introduction	5
Refused during screening interview	3
Language or disability prevented completion of interview	15
Rate of Completion of Eligibility Screening Interview <sup>c</sup>	86.8%
Rate of Eligibility for Main Questionnaires <sup>d</sup>	57.0%
<b>Response Rate<sup>e</sup></b>	<b>59.7%</b>

NOTES:

<sup>a</sup> Could not locate person on the list frame.

<sup>b</sup> The number of respondents located as a percentage of the total number of telephone numbers dialed.

<sup>c</sup> The number of respondents who completed the screening interview as a percentage of the number of respondents located.

<sup>d</sup> The number of respondents found eligible for the main questionnaires as a percentage of the number of respondents who completed the screening interview.

<sup>e</sup> The number of respondents who completed the screening interview as a percentage of the number of telephone numbers dialed.

TABLE II.11

COMPLETION AND RESPONSE RATES TO THE LIST-FRAME SCREENING INTERVIEW,  
BY SITE

Site	Rate of Locating Respondent <sup>a</sup>	Rate of Completing Screening Interview <sup>b</sup>	Response Rate <sup>c</sup>
<b>Urban</b>			
Suffolk, MA (Boston)	69.6%	75.0%	52.2%
Galveston, TX	53.4%	100.0%	53.4%
Adams, CO (Denver)	74.2%	82.6%	61.3%
Philadelphia, PA	76.9%	80.0%	61.5%
Ramsey, MN (Minneapolis)	75.0%	77.7%	58.3%
Durham, NC	57.1%	83.3%	47.6%
<b>Rural</b>			
Bedford, PA	88.9%	87.5%	77.8%
Murray, MN	84.6%	95.5%	80.8%
<b>All</b>	<b>68.8%</b>	<b>86.8%</b>	<b>59.7%</b>

## NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>The number of respondents located as a percentage of the total number of telephone numbers dialed.

<sup>b</sup>The number of respondents who completed the screening interview as a percentage of the number of respondents located.

<sup>c</sup>The number of respondents who completed the screening interview as a percentage of the number of telephone numbers dialed.

Groves, and Lepkowski 1987). This is because the advance letter authenticates that the study is legitimate and provides other information that encourages participation in the survey. Third, the screening interview did not ask any sensitive questions--only three respondents refused any of the questions during the screening interview. Fifteen respondents could not complete the interview because of language, sickness, or a disability.

## **2. Resource Requirements for Identifying Respondents Using a List Frame**

The main advantage of using the list-frame was that it was a less costly way to identify FSP participants. In this section, we identify the resources needed to identify FSP participants using the list-frame. We begin by discussing the rate at which we found persons eligible for the main questionnaires.

### **a. Rate at Which We Found Respondents Eligible for the Main Questionnaires**

The advantage of using a list-frame over an RDD sampling frame is that all persons on the list-frame were FSP participants, at least at the time the frame was constructed. We could also ensure that the participant belonged to an elderly household at the time the frame was constructed. An RDD frame, however, includes all persons with telephones, including middle- and high-income households, persons in households with no working or elderly persons, and persons who have never participated in any government program. We found that 57 percent of persons who completed the list-frame screening interview were found to be eligible for the main questionnaires, compared with less than 10 percent of persons who completed the RDD screening interview.

The rates at which we found persons eligible for the main questionnaires are presented, by site, in Table II.12. The table distinguishes between persons that were designated on the list-frame as

TABLE II.12

RATE AT WHICH RESPONDENTS TO THE LIST-FRAME SCREENING INTERVIEW ARE  
FOUND TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE MAIN QUESTIONNAIRES, BY SITE

	Specified by the Food Stamp Agency as:		
Site	Working	Elderly	Total
Urban			
Suffolk, MA (Boston)	14%	60%	33%
Galveston, TX	57%	91%	67%
Adams, CO (Denver)	33%	86%	53%
Philadelphia, PA	25%	50%	38%
Ramsey, MN (Minneapolis)	50%	65%	61%
Durham, NC	0%	60%	30%
Rural			
Bedford, PA	80%	50%	71%
Murray, MN	40%	82%	62%
All	45%	72%	57%



“working” from persons designated as “elderly.”<sup>25</sup> The eligibility rate for the elderly households is much higher than that for working households--72 percent for elderly households and 45 percent for working households. This finding was expected for two reasons. First, the state FSP agencies identified elderly households for us (at least at the time the frame was created), but not all state agencies were able to identify working households. Second, the elderly do not move on and off food stamps as much as persons in working households (Gleason et al. 1998). So the elderly are likely to still be on food stamps if they received them several months ago. This is much less likely to be true for the working participants. The eligibility rate for working participants and, to a lesser extent, elderly participants would almost certainly be higher if the sample frame was more up-to-date.

#### **b. Reasons Respondents Were Found Ineligible for the Main Questionnaires**

Respondents to the list-frame screening interview were found ineligible for the main questionnaires for three reasons (see Table II.13):

1. ***They were no longer receiving food stamps.*** This was the most common reason respondents were found ineligible. Of 151 persons who completed the screening interview, 32 persons (21 percent) were not receiving food stamps.
2. ***They had not applied within the last three years.*** As in the RDD screening interview, this was an important reason why participants on the list-frame were found to be ineligible for the main questionnaires. Of the 119 persons who completed the screening interview and were still on food stamps, 26 persons (22 percent) reported that they had not applied within the past three years.
3. ***The household contained neither an elderly nor a working person.*** Seven persons reported that they did not live in a household with either a working or an elderly person.

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<sup>25</sup>We treated both the persons designated as “working” and those designated as “elderly” identically. In the screening interview, the interviewer checked that the respondent was from either a working or an elderly household. A person who was designated as “working” would have been eligible for an elderly main questionnaire if they reported that an elderly person lived in the household.

TABLE II.13

REASONS RESPONDENTS TO THE LIST-FRAME SCREENING INTERVIEW WERE FOUND  
INELIGIBLE FOR THE MAIN QUESTIONNAIRES

Reason	Number of Respondents <sup>a</sup>		Number of Respondents Found Ineligible For Each Reason as Percent of:	
	Found Ineligible for Reason	Who Answered the Questions	All Respondents Who Were Found Ineligible	All Respondents Who Answered the Questions
Did not receive food stamps this month or last	32	151	49.2%	21.2%
Last applied for food stamps more than three years previously	26	119	40.0%	21.8%
Neither a working nor an elderly person in the household	7	93	10.8%	7.5%
Total Number of Respondents Who Completed Screening Interviews	-	151	-	151
Total Number of Respondents Found Ineligible	65	-	65	-

NOTE:

<sup>a</sup> Only includes respondents who completed the screening interview.

### **c. Interviewer Time Spent on List-Frame Screening Interviews**

It was much quicker to identify each respondent for the main questionnaire using the list-frame than it was to identify a respondent using RDD (see Table II.14). Interviewers spent an average of 31 minutes to identify each respondent for the main questionnaires using the list frame, compared with 5.8 hours to identify a respondent for the main questionnaires using RDD. Interviewers spent an average of 10 minutes per telephone number called, similar to the time spent per RDD telephone number called.

Our estimates of the time needed to identify each type of eligible survey respondent using the list-frame are presented in Table II.15. To identify one working participant requires 38 minutes of interviewer labor. Because the rate at which we found persons on the elderly lists was higher, it required less interviewer time to identify an elderly participant--only about 24 minutes.

A survey about nonparticipation would always need to identify nonparticipants using RDD. Once an RDD survey is being conducted to identify nonparticipants, is it cheaper to identify participants using RDD or the list-frame? The answer is that it is cheaper to identify participants using RDD as long as it does not increase the total number of RDD telephone numbers that need to be called. If the design allows all the participants to be found as a by-product of identifying the nonparticipants, the additional fixed costs of obtaining the lists can be avoided by not using a list-frame. However, if the design requires more participants than could be identified as a by-product of identifying nonparticipants, then using a list-frame to identify the “additional” participants would reduce survey costs.

As an example, our findings suggest that to find 100 working nonparticipants, 4,690 RDD telephone numbers would need to be dialed (Table II.8). While calling these numbers, we would

TABLE II.14

NUMBERS CALLED, TIMES EACH NUMBER DIALED, AND TIME SPENT ON  
INTERVIEWING: LIST-FRAME SCREENING

Telephone numbers called	253
Average times number was dialed	4.4
Total time spent on screening (hours) <sup>a</sup>	44
Average time spent screening per number called (minutes)	10
Average time spent screening per eligible respondent (minutes)	31

NOTE:

<sup>a</sup>Includes all time spent by telephone interviewers on list-frame screening. This includes time spent logging into the CATI system, calling numbers, determining residential status, talking with supervisors, and time between calls.

TABLE II.15

ESTIMATES OF RESOURCES REQUIRED TO IDENTIFY SURVEY  
RESPONDENTS USING A LIST-FRAME

Respondent Group	Numbers Called to Identify 100 Eligible Respondents	Average Time Spent Screening Per Eligible Respondent (Minutes)
Working participants	371	38
Elderly participants	233	24

find about 15 working participants. The cost of identifying these 15 participants is very small—it is just the additional time it takes to ask two more questions on the interview. But the cost of finding the sixteenth participant using RDD is huge, because it would require the interviewers to call another 308 telephone numbers.

## **C. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS**

We discuss below our conclusions and recommendations about identifying FSP nonparticipants and participants for a survey about FSP nonparticipation based on our experiences in the pretest.

### **1. It Is Feasible To Identify FSP-Eligible Nonparticipants Using RDD**

The pretest showed that it is feasible to identify FSP-eligible nonparticipants using RDD. However, it does require considerable survey resources. Using RDD, we called nearly 17,000 telephone numbers to identify 484 nonparticipants who were likely to be eligible for food stamps and were from either working or elderly households. We estimate that it would take over 18,000 hours of interviewer labor to identify a sample of about 1,000 nonparticipants from working households and 1,000 nonparticipants from elderly households.

### **2. A List Frame is Needed if the Survey is to Include FSP Participants**

If RDD is being used to identify nonparticipants, identifying participants at the same time requires little additional interviewer time. However, identifying participants once the target for nonparticipants has been reached would be extremely costly, many times more than identifying the participant using the list frame. Our pretest findings suggest that we would find about one working participant for every six working nonparticipants and one elderly participant for every four elderly nonparticipants. As most survey designs would require a ratio of participants to nonparticipants of at least one participant for every three

nonparticipants, if it is decided that the survey should include participants, a mixed-frame design would be the most efficient one.

### **3. A Response Rate to the Screening Interview of 70 Percent Could be Achieved on the Screening Interviews**

Nonresponse is a potential concern because it could bias the survey findings. The response rate to an RDD screening interview to identify nonparticipants is unlikely to be high for three reasons. First, response rates to RDD surveys are typically low. Use of answering machines, call-forwarding, and telephone solicitation all contribute to low response rates to RDD surveys. Obtaining a response rate above 70 percent for an RDD survey is rare.<sup>26</sup> Second, the screening interview includes questions about household income and assets--questions that are both difficult and sensitive. Third, nonparticipants may be uninterested in topics related to a program that they have chosen not to participate in.

We found response rates of just under 60 percent on the RDD screening interview, in the same range as found in other RDD surveys (Massey et al. 1997). A similar response rate was found for the list-frame survey. With some changes in survey design and operations, the response rate to both screening interviews could be 70 percent. These changes include modifications to the screening interview, sending an advance letter to persons on the RDD lists, lengthening the field period, obtaining current lists of FSP participants more quickly, and using commercial services to identify persons on the list-frame. These changes are discussed in more detail below.

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<sup>26</sup>Massey et al. (1997).

#### **4. We Recommend Modifying the RDD Screening Interview**

When designing a screening interview, there is a fine line between developing an interview that makes a good determination of FSP eligibility and one that asks so many detailed and sensitive questions that its response rate is unacceptably low. We believe the RDD screening interview used in the pretest, with the modifications described below, hits about the right balance between the two objectives of keeping the interview short and simple and doing a good job of predicting FSP-eligibility.

We suggest the following four modifications to the RDD screening interview:

##### **a. Change the Order of the Questions on the RDD Screening Interview**

In the pretest, the first two questions of the RDD screening interview were about household size and income. To the respondent, neither question would seem relevant to the topic of the survey and the income question is both difficult and sensitive. Our rationale for placing these questions at the beginning of the interview was that it would keep the interview extremely short for the people who were ineligible. While we found that most people were ineligible and the interview was indeed short for these people, the “price” of the reduction in the length of these interviews may have been a lower response rate.

To increase the response rates, the first two questions of a survey should be easy, unobjectionable, and related to the survey topic (Dillman 1978 and Frey 1989). We recommend that the screening interview begin with the question about whether the respondent receives food stamps. The next questions could be about whether the household contained a working or elderly person--again questions directly related to the topic. The third question could be a question directly related to the respondents experiences with food stamps. For example, we could ask nonparticipants whether they have ever received food stamps. We could then follow these questions with the questions about receipt of TANF, GA, and SSI,



whether they have been found ineligible to receive food stamps, and household vehicles. Only after these questions would we ask about income and assets.

**b. Modify the Income Question for Respondents in Working Households**

We found that nearly half of the respondents in households with earnings who reported income of less than 130 percent of the poverty threshold in the screening interview later reported earnings and other income greater than 130 percent of the poverty threshold. We recommend that respondents in working households are reminded by the interviewer to include all earnings from all adults in the household when asked the income question.

**c. Insert An Interviewer Probe After Each Asset Question**

The questions about assets are important screens. For example, the question about cash and other assets in checking or savings accounts screens out 22 percent of persons who passed the preceding screens. However, the rate of nonresponse to the asset questions was typically high. We recommend keeping the asset questions, but adding probes for people who do not respond that reiterate why we need this information, that we only need to know whether their assets are less than a certain amount, and that the information will be confidential.

**d. Probe Inconsistent Responses to the Questions About Receipt of Food Stamps**

We asked respondents who said that they received food stamps when they last received food stamps. If the respondent said they last received food stamps more than two months previously, contradicting an earlier response, we treated the respondent as ineligible for the main survey. We recommend that an interviewer probe is inserted after this question that asks respondents about the discrepancy in their

responses. If the respondent is in fact a nonparticipant, then the interviewer would circle back and ask the respondent the screening questions to determine whether they are likely to be FSP-eligible.

## **5. We Recommend Sending Advance Letters to Persons on the RDD Sample Frame**

Prior to calling the respondents in the list-frame, we sent them a short letter, explaining the study and notifying the respondents that we would call them shortly. The lower rate of refusals before the first question in the list-frame screening interview may be because of the advance letter. It is possible to also send advance letters to some persons on the RDD frame. (To conserve resources, we did not send advance letters to the persons on the RDD frame during the pretest.) Names and addresses are attached to telephone numbers in the RDD sample frame only for those persons whose telephone numbers are listed in the telephone directory--about 30 or 35 percent of the telephone numbers. MPR's experience in previous surveys is that 20 to 30 percent of advance letters sent are returned because the address is incorrect. Hence, we would expect that between 20 and 30 percent of persons on the RDD frame could receive an advance letter.

## **6. We Recommend Lengthening the Field Period**

In the pretest we found that the completion rate for determining whether the telephone number belonged to a residence was lower than is typically found in RDD surveys. One explanation is that RDD survey was conducted in only three months. MPR's experience has been that the completion rate for determining residency increases with the length of the field period. With a longer field period, more calls can be made and with longer periods of time between calls.

## **7. We Recommend Increasing the Rate at Which Persons on the List-Frame are Located**

We could not locate over 30 percent of the persons on the list frame. We recommend three changes to increase the rate at which we located persons on the list frame:

1. ***Obtain Current Lists of FSP Participants as Quickly as Possible.*** The importance of obtaining the data quickly needs to be emphasized to FSP office staff. The state FSP agencies should be notified many months in advance of the intended request. The samples should be created quickly and the lists of addresses and telephone numbers to be checked should be sent to the caseworkers as soon as possible. In this way, the delay between when the lists are created and when they are used can be reduced.
2. ***Use Commercial Services to Obtain More Locating Information.*** Commercial services exist that can provide telephone numbers, changes of addresses, and telephone numbers for neighbors. These can provide additional contact information for some persons. However, our experience is that information from these sources will be available for only a small proportion of the persons on the list-frame. This is because most of the information comes from credit agencies and many low-income persons do not have established credit histories.
3. ***Conduct In-Person Follow Up.*** Those persons on the list-frame who cannot be located by telephone may be located by an interviewer going in-person to the person's address. Even if the person is not at home, neighbors may provide information about how the person could be reached.

### **III. ADEQUACY OF THE MAIN QUESTIONNAIRES IN COLLECTING THE INFORMATION THEY WERE DESIGNED TO COLLECT**

Eight different questionnaires were administered during the pretest. A separate questionnaire was administered to each of the four types of respondents--working nonparticipants, elderly nonparticipants, working participants, and elderly participants. And we designed a long and a short version of the questionnaire for each type of respondent.

All the questionnaires included questions on household composition, past experiences applying for and using food stamps, food security, and some demographic characteristics of the respondent. The nonparticipant questionnaires also include a section that asks in detail why the respondent does not participate. The long versions of the questionnaires also include questions on receipt of food assistance other than food stamps, employment, health (elderly only), social supports, income and expenses, and questions about the respondent's knowledge of the FSP. They also include more questions about food security. The content of each type of questionnaire is summarized in Table III.1.

This chapter reports on how well these instruments collected the information they were designed to collect. We address such issues as the adequacy of question wording, response categories, instructions and probes, interview length, choice of respondent, and, more generally, identify ways in which the instruments could be improved. Three sources of information were used to make our assessment: (1) the frequency of item nonresponse and responses that do not fit any of the response codes; (2) respondent debriefing questions administered at the end of each interview; and (3) the behavioral coding of 40 questionnaires.

TABLE III.1  
CONTENT OF QUESTIONNAIRES

Sections	Working Poor				Poor Elderly			
	Participant, Long Version	Participant, Short Version	Nonparticipant , Long Version	Nonparticipant , Short Version	Participant, Long Version	Participant, Short Version	Nonparticipant , Long Version	Nonparticipant, Short Version
A: Household Composition <sup>a</sup>	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
B: Knowledge of the FSP	T		T		T		T	
C: FSP Participation History	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
D: History of FSP Applications	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
E: Reasons for Nonparticipation			T	T			T	T
F: Receipt of Other Food Assistance	T		T		T		T	
G: Food Security <sup>b</sup>	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
H: Employment History <sup>c</sup>	T		T		T		T	
I: Health					T		T	
J: Social Supports	T		T		T		T	
K: Income and Expenses	T		T		T		T	
L: Demographic Information <sup>d</sup>	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T

NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>In the long version, the questionnaire obtains information on the age and relationship of everyone in the household; the short version only asks about the number of elderly persons, children, and working persons in the household.

<sup>b</sup>The long version contains a battery of questions on the food security of the household; only six questions on food security are included in the short version.

<sup>c</sup>All long versions ask about the wage rate and hours worked for each person in the household; the working long questionnaires also ask about the type of job worked and the work history of the person in the household who works the most hours.

<sup>d</sup>Only the long version contains questions about citizenship of household members.



The remainder of this chapter is organized into five sections. Section A discusses completion rates to the main questionnaires. Section B describes the time required to administer the questionnaires. Section C discusses the choice of respondent for the main questionnaires. Section D summarizes the performance of the questionnaires at the question-level and recommends changes to some questions. (Appendix A lists some other minor changes that should be made to the questionnaires.) Finally, Section E summarizes our main findings and discusses their implications for the content and implementation of the survey on a larger scale.

## **A. MAIN QUESTIONNAIRE COMPLETION RATES**

Completion rates are an important indicator of the feasibility of fielding the questionnaires nationally. Related, the prevalence in which respondents “break-off” the interview once it begins and the point in the questionnaire at which these break-offs occur are indicators of the performance of the questionnaires. Break-offs early in the process of administering the questionnaire could be indicative of sensitive topics; while break-offs occurring toward the end of the questionnaire could be evidence that the questionnaires are too long.

Details on completion rates and respondent break-offs by interview mode and type of questionnaire are provided in this section. In order to place these findings in context, it is important to understand differences in study procedures between telephone and in-person interviews. All pretest respondents--regardless of whether the main questionnaire was to be administered by telephone or in-person--were first administered a screening interview by telephone. If the respondent lived in an area selected for telephone interviewing, once a household was determined eligible during the screening interview, the interviewer would immediately begin administering a hard-copy main questionnaire. On the other hand, if the respondent lived in an area selected for in-person interviewing, at the completion of the screening interview

the interviewer would tell eligible respondents that a field interviewer would be contacting them within one week to schedule an in-person interview.

Overall, 451 of 534 eligible pretest respondents, or 85 percent, completed a main questionnaire (Table III.2).<sup>27</sup> Combined with the response rate to the screening interviews of 60 percent, the overall response rate to the pretest survey was 51 percent ( $.60 \times .85 = .51$ ). If we consider only telephone interviews, the overall response rate was 53 percent ( $.60 \times .88 = .53$ ).

### **1. Main Questionnaire Completion Rates by Interview Mode**

The overall completion rate to the main questionnaires masks important differences by interview mode. We obtained substantially higher completion rates administering the questionnaires by telephone than in-person. Overall, 384 of 438 eligible pretest respondents (88 percent) surveyed by telephone completed main questionnaires compared with 67 of 96 eligible respondents (70 percent) interviewed in-person (Table III.3). Completion rates for questionnaires administered by telephone ranged between 82 and 100 percent for the four respondent groups, whereas rates for in-person interviews ranged between 50 percent and 83 percent (Table III.2). For each respondent subgroup, completion rates were higher for telephone than in-person interviews.

Completion rates were higher for telephone interviews than for in-person interviews for several reasons. The most important reason was the reluctance of households selected for in-person interviews

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<sup>27</sup>Although screening interviews were completed with 662 respondents who were eligible for the main questionnaires, we did not attempt to administer main questionnaires to 128 of these respondents. Of these, 104 were not attempted because we had already met our target for that group and 24 because the respondent only spoke Spanish. These 128 respondents are not included in our calculations of the main questionnaire completion rate.



TABLE III.2

## RESPONSE RATES TO MAIN QUESTIONNAIRES, BY QUESTIONNAIRE TYPE

Type of Respondent	Length of Questionnaire	Questionnaire Mode	Number Eligible	Number Sent to Field <sup>a</sup>	Number of Completes	Response Rate <sup>b</sup>
<b>Working nonparticipant</b>	Short	Telephone	84	n.a.	77	91.7
	Short	In-person	16	10	10	62.5 (100.0)
	Long	Telephone	91	n.a.	76	83.5
	Long	In-person	19	18	14	73.7 (77.8)
<b>Elderly nonparticipant</b>	Short	Telephone	55	n.a.	45	81.8
	Short	In-person	10	7	6	60.0 (85.7)
	Long	Telephone	81	n.a.	69	85.2
	Long	In-person	12	8	6	50.0 (75.0)
<b>Working participant</b>	Short	Telephone	29	n.a.	27	93.1
	Short	In-person	12	10	10	83.3 (100.0)
	Long	Telephone	33	n.a.	30	90.9
	Long	In-person	8	7	6	75.0 (85.7)
<b>Elderly participant</b>	Short	Telephone	34	n.a.	34	100.0
	Short	In-person	10	9	9	90.0 (100.0)
	Long	Telephone	31	n.a.	26	83.9
	Long	In-person	9	7	6	66.7 (85.7)
<b>Total</b>	<b>Both</b>	<b>Both</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>84.5</b>
Spanish-speaking <sup>c</sup>	Both	Both	24	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Target met <sup>d</sup>	Both	Both	104	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Total</b>	<b>Both</b>	<b>Both</b>	<b>662</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>n.a.</b>	<b>n.a.</b>

NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Number of eligible cases agreeing to participate in an in-person survey.<sup>b</sup>Number in parentheses is the percentage of cases released to the field that were completed interviews.<sup>c</sup>Respondents who completed a screening interview, but were not eligible to complete a main questionnaire because they spoke only Spanish.<sup>d</sup>Respondents who were eligible to complete a main questionnaire but who were not interviewed because we had already met our target for that group.

n.a. = not applicable

TABLE III.3

## SELECTED SUMMARY MEASURES FOR RESPONSE RATES TO MAIN QUESTIONNAIRE

Mode of Interview or Type of Respondent	Length of Questionnaire	Number Eligible	Number of Completes	Response Rate
Telephone Interviews	Both	438	384	87.7
In-person Interviews	Both	96	67	69.8
Nonparticipants	Both	368	303	82.3
Participants	Both	166	148	89.2
All	Short	250	218	87.2
All	Long	284	233	82.0

to allow field interviewers into their homes. Twenty of the 96 eligible pretest respondents selected for an in-person interview (21 percent) refused to participate in the study once they learned at the end of the screening interview that the main interview would be conducted in-person. These respondents reported that they would be willing to participate if the main interview was conducted over the telephone. We completed in-person interviews with 67 of the remaining 76 eligible pretest respondents, or 88 percent. This percentage is similar to the overall completion rate achieved for telephone interviews.

Another reason for the higher completion rate for telephone interviews was that the lag between the time of the initial telephone contact and the call by the field interviewer to schedule an interview gave respondents time to think about whether they in fact wanted to participate in the survey. Nine respondents changed their mind. A few respondents said they did not want to participate when field interviewers called to schedule appointments for in-person interviews. The others scheduled interviews, but were not home when the interviewer arrived at the scheduled time and could later not be reached to schedule another appointment. Although some of these cancellations may have in fact been legitimate, we suspect that some of them were intentional--the respondents changed their minds about being interviewed so they scheduled interviews at times they knew they would not be at home. It is possible that completion rates for in-person interviews could have been higher if field interviewers were given more time and resources to attempt to persuade reluctant respondents to participate.

In-person interviews were conducted in the pretest to test the in-person administration of the questionnaire. In a national survey, in-person interviews would only be administered to persons without telephones who would also be screened in-person, and respondents who are screened by telephone would also complete the main questionnaire by telephone. Hence, the in-person response rates found in this study

are *not* indicative of the response rates that would be found in a national study in which only non-telephone households would be administered questionnaires in-person.

## **2. Main Questionnaire Completion Rates by FSP Participant Status**

Completion rates were higher for FSP pretest participants than nonparticipants; this was especially true for in-person interviews. Overall, 148 of 166 FSP participants (89 percent) completed main questionnaires compared with 303 of 368 nonparticipants (82 percent, see Table III.3).

Completion rates were higher for participant than nonparticipant respondents for two reasons. First, virtually all FSP participants sampled for this study were sent an advance letter describing the purpose of the study and how their household was selected for the study, whereas nonparticipants were not provided an advance letter. Second, as current recipients of program benefits, FSP participants probably feel a greater sense of obligation to respond than nonparticipants, who are not directly benefitting from the program. In addition, to the extent that they believe the input they provide will be considered and used to improve the FSP, participants may be more predisposed than nonparticipants to respond because they perceive that they would directly benefit from future program enhancements through their continued program participation.

## **3. Main Questionnaire Completion Rates by Questionnaire Length**

In general, completion rates were also higher for those pretest respondents administered the short version of the questionnaire than the long version. The differences were approximately 5 to 6 percentage points (see Table III.2). Overall, 218 of 250 individuals (87 percent) administered a short questionnaire completed the interview compared with 233 of 284 individuals (82 percent) administered the longer version of the questionnaire (see Table III.3). A similar pattern holds when we control for interview mode (see

Table III.2). For interviews conducted by telephone, 91 percent of households administered a short version completed the questionnaire compared with 85 percent administered a long version. Overall, 73 percent of households administered a short version in-person completed the interview compared with 67 percent of households administered a long version in-person.

Most of the nonresponse to the main questionnaire occurred prior to its administration; there were relatively few break-offs to the main interview once it began (see next section). In the case of telephone interviews, after the completion of the screening interview, interviewers would lead into the main questionnaire by saying they have additional questions, giving the length of time the remainder of the interview would take (10 minutes for a short-version and 20 minutes for a long version).<sup>28</sup> Not surprisingly, compared with respondents who were selected for the short-version of the questionnaires, a greater proportion of respondents who were selected for the long-version of the questionnaires refused to continue once they learned how much more time they would have to spend completing the interview. In addition, some respondents who completed the interviews, typically elderly ones, commented during the debriefing section of the interview that the length of the interview was “trying” and “too long,” often asking interviewers several times during the course of the interview how much longer the interview would take.

#### **4. Interview Break-Offs**

Once the main questionnaire was being administered, only five respondents interviewed by telephone broke-off the interview; none of the respondents interviewed in-person broke-off interviews once they started. There was no pattern to the break-offs. A few respondents said they did not feel well; the others

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<sup>28</sup>In fact, as discussed in the next section, it turned out that the interviews took longer than this.

mentioned needing to tend to small children. None of the break-offs appeared to be related to sensitive questions. Break-offs also did not appear to be related to the length of the interview.

## **B. MAIN QUESTIONNAIRE INTERVIEW LENGTH**

Overall, long-versions of the questionnaire administered by telephone took on average 26 minutes to complete; short-versions took approximately 15 minutes (see Table III.4). Both the short- and longer-version instruments took approximately 10 minutes longer to administer in-person than by telephone.

Longer administration times for in-person interviews most likely reflect the fact that in-person interviews tend to be more “conversational” than telephone interviews. There are greater opportunities for social interaction in face-to-face personal interviews than for interviews conducted over the telephone by essentially unknown interviewers. In-person interviews also tend to be longer because respondents are more likely to be interrupted or distracted. For example, this might happen when other family members present during the interview interject comments or children interrupt the discussions.

The administration time for working questionnaires did not differ much from the administration time for the elderly questionnaires. Interview administration time for elderly respondents is usually longer than for other respondents. But in this survey, the respondent was chosen to be the person who would have applied for food stamps, or did apply for food stamps, a person who is less likely to be cognitively impaired than the broader elderly population. Also, the respondent to 15 percent of the elderly questionnaires was not elderly.

TABLE III.4

## ADMINISTRATION TIME FOR MAIN QUESTIONNAIRES, BY QUESTIONNAIRE TYPE

Type of Respondent	Type of Questionnaire		Interview Time (Minutes)	
	Questionnaire Length	Questionnaire Mode	Median	Mean <sup>a</sup>
Working nonparticipant	Short	Telephone	16	17
	Short	In-person	27	27
	Long	Telephone	25	26
	Long	In-person	38	39
Elderly nonparticipant	Short	Telephone	15	17
	Short	In-person	23	23
	Long	Telephone	25	25
	Long	In-person	38	38
Working participant	Short	Telephone	15	14
	Short	In-person	23	22
	Long	Telephone	27	28
	Long	In-person	31	32
Elderly participant	Short	Telephone	15	16
	Short	In-person	30	26
	Long	Telephone	27	29
	Long	In-person	31	29
<b>Summary Measures</b>				
Nonparticipants	Short	Telephone	17	15
Nonparticipants	Long	Telephone	26	25
Participants	Short	Telephone	15	15
Participants	Long	Telephone	29	27
All	Short	In-person	25	25
All	Long	In-person	35	35
<b>All</b>	<b>Both</b>	<b>Both</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>23</b>

NOTE:

<sup>a</sup>Eight cases--all telephone interviews--had recorded interview lengths in excess of 100 minutes. When estimating the mean, we treated these cases as an error in reporting by the interviewer and assigned them "missing data." These cases are not included in the calculation of the mean of the interview administration time.

FSP nonparticipant interviews were generally somewhat longer than participant interviews. This was true for both the short and long versions of the questionnaires. Participant and nonparticipant questionnaires were designed to be similar except nonparticipants were asked about reasons for nonparticipation (Section E). Despite this difference, we anticipated that administration times would be similar between nonparticipants and participant questionnaires. On one hand, nonparticipant interviews would tend to be longer than participant ones because they contain Section E--the detailed sequence of questions on reasons for nonparticipation--and participant questionnaires do not. On the other hand, although both nonparticipant and participant questionnaires contain sections on FSP application and participation experiences, all participants would be asked most questions in these sections whereas only those nonparticipants that were former participants or had previously applied for food stamps would be asked these questions. It turned out that about 16 percent of nonparticipants in our pretest samples had prior experience with the FSP, having either applied or received food stamps in the past three years. This resulted in nonparticipant interviews being somewhat longer on average than those of participants.

### **C. CHOICE OF RESPONDENT FOR THE MAIN QUESTIONNAIRES**

When conducting a survey about nonparticipation among working and elderly households, who in the household should be the respondent to the main questionnaire? In nonparticipating households, we interviewed the person in the household who would most likely go to the FSP office and complete an application form if the household decided to participate in the program. Our rationale was that this person would be the most knowledgeable about the reasons for nonparticipation. Similarly, in participating households, we interviewed the person who last applied for food stamps.

At the end of the screening interview, we asked nonparticipant respondents whether they or someone else in the household would most likely go to the FSP office and complete an application form. We asked



participant respondents whether they or someone else in their household last applied for food stamps. About 83 percent of the respondents replied that they would either apply for food stamps or they had previously applied for food stamps. In these cases, the respondent to the screening interview was administered the main questionnaire. About 17 percent of the respondents replied that it was someone else in the household who would apply for food stamps or who had previously applied for food stamps. In these cases, we administered the main questionnaire to someone other than the respondent to the screening interview.

Our decision to administer the main questionnaire to the person in the household who would apply for food stamps or who did apply for food stamps meant that the respondent to the main questionnaire was sometimes not the working person in the working household or the elderly person in an elderly household. In about 20 percent of working households, the person who would (or did) apply for food stamps was not working; and in about 15 percent of elderly households the person who would (or did) apply for food stamps was not elderly.

## **D. PERFORMANCE OF INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS**

This section discusses the performance of the main questionnaires at the question-level. The discussion is organized around each topic section. For each section, we first briefly describe the section and its informational objectives; summarize the section's performance; and then discuss problem questions and corrective action for those questions that did not appear to work well.

### **1. Section A: Household Composition**

In the long versions of the questionnaires, Section A asks respondents to list each member of the household including themselves, and then for each listed household member, to report the household member's age and the relationship of the household member to the respondent. The short versions only ask respondents to report the number of household members age 60 or older and the number of members less than 18 years of age.

Respondents did not have any difficulty answering these questions. Less than 5 percent of the respondents did not answer either the question about the household member's relationship to the respondent or the question about the age of the household member. Behavioral coding revealed only three instances in which respondents asked for clarification or in which interviewers did not probe correctly. One respondent did not feel comfortable listing the "first name" of a household member on the household grid. Based on this evidence, there is no need to revise any of the questions in Section A of the questionnaires.

## **2. Section B: Knowledge of the Food Stamp Program**

This section of the questionnaire collects information about factors that may be related to the respondent's awareness of the program, such as whether the respondent received food stamp benefits as a child, or whether he or she knew someone (for example, a neighbor, friend, or coworker) who received food stamps. It also asks whether the respondent had heard of the FSP prior to the pretest. Section B only appears in the long versions of the questionnaire.

Section B questions worked well; there is no need to revise any of the questions. Refusals or responses of "don't know" varied between 7 and 15 percent. While this might seem like a relatively large proportion, "don't know" responses predominated. These are legitimate responses to questions about whether the respondent's parents received food stamps when the respondent was a child and whether the respondents neighbors or friends receive food stamps.

Behavioral coding indicated a few cases in which respondents asked interviewers to repeat questions. About one-quarter of the questionnaires subject to behavioral coding involved respondents taking a long pause before answering. Again, this is not evidence of problematic questions; rather, this evidence is consistent with acceptable response behavior on the part of respondents who are simply taking a little extra time to answer because they are being asked to think retrospectively.

### **3. Section C: Food Stamp Program Participation History**

This section asks respondents about their experiences receiving and using food stamps. Current FSP participants as well as nonparticipants who have received food stamps in the past were asked these questions. In addition, we asked nonparticipants who had previously received food stamp benefits why they stopped participating in the FSP. Section C questions are included in both the long and short versions of the questionnaires.

Most of the questions in Section C worked well. However, respondents had difficulties understanding some of the questions. In some cases, it appears that no revision would be necessary, as long as future versions of the questionnaire are administered by computer assisted survey interviews (CASI). Question C4 provides an example of this issue:<sup>29</sup>

***“C4: How did you get your food stamp benefits in (DATE FROM C3)? Did you get coupons or credit to an EBT card?”***

***Probe: By EBT card I mean.....***

***Colorado: EBT card is called Colorado Quest;***

***Massachusetts: EBT card is called an EBT card;***

***Texas: EBT card is called the Lone Star Card;***

***No EBT card in Minnesota, North Carolina, or Pennsylvania***

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<sup>29</sup>The questions corresponding to the question number are almost identical across the questionnaires.

***COUPONS .....01***

***EBT CARD .....02”***

Forty percent of interviewer-respondent interactions were classified as either “medium or high” and involved several instances in which respondents asked the interviewer for clarifying information. In addition, a few interviewers incorrectly administered the question or probed responses. These problems were largely the product of the “hard copy” nature of the questionnaires. Interviewers had to determine (1) what date to “fill-in” by looking at Question C3, and (2) what location-specific EBT card name to mention. CASI programming would fill-in this information automatically, thereby eliminating the confusion and awkwardness respondents were experiencing from interviewers having to figure out dates and location-specific names of EBT cards.

Question C6 of the nonparticipant questionnaires asked former participants : ***“Why did you stop participating in the food stamp program?”*** Several former participants provided an answer not covered by the response codes that had to do with “failing to comply with FSP rules or respond to a request by FSP staff.” We recommend that the questionnaires be revised to include this as a response category.

One-third of questionnaires subject to behavioral coding involved respondents asking the interviewer to repeat Question C13c:

***“C13c When you received food stamps in the past three years, did you ever do things so that people would not find out you received food stamp benefits?”***

***Probe:***

***For example, some people try to use their food stamp benefits in stores where they are unlikely to meet anyone they know.”***

We believe respondents would have less trouble with Question C13c if it is revised so that the text currently serving as a “probe” is included directly as part of the question as asked. The revised question would read:

***“C13c When you received food stamps in the past three years, did you ever do things so that people would not find out you received food stamp benefits, such as using your food stamp benefits in stores where you are unlikely to meet anyone you know?”***

#### **4. Section D: History of Food Stamp Applications**

Section D collects information from respondents about their recent experiences applying for food stamps: the reasons they applied for food stamp benefits, whether they applied for other benefits at the time they applied for food stamp benefits, whether they applied for food stamp benefits in-person or via an authorized representative, and specific problems that they may have encountered when applying. Nonparticipants who started but did not complete the application process are asked to state the reasons they did not complete the application process. Participants are asked about factors that helped them overcome any barriers applying for or using food stamps. Most questions in the section worked as designed. There were some exceptions. The problem questions, and our recommended solutions, are discussed in the remainder of this section.

##### **a. Confusion About the Term “Application”**

The focus of Section D is on the respondent’s experiences during his or her *most recent application* for food stamps, as opposed to recertification--the periodic renewal of one’s application for food stamps. Despite the inclusion in Question D1 of the phrase “by applied, I mean have you completed a *new* application form,” some respondents had difficulty understanding that we wanted information about their application rather than ongoing recertification. Behavioral coding indicated considerable interviewer-respondent interaction categorized in the “medium/high” range in the first two to three questions in Section

D, as several respondents needed clarification on what we meant by “applying for food stamps.” We believe we can reduce confusion on the part of respondents and the resulting lengthy interviewer-respondent interaction by inserting the following introductory text prior to asking Section D questions:

***“INTRODUCTION TO SECTION D: My next questions are about applying for food stamps during the past three years. By applying I mean when you completed a new application for food stamps. Please do not include the times you were required to recertify your food stamp eligibility, that is, when you had to go back to renew your application for food stamp benefits.”***

**b. Need to Break Some Questions into Multiple Questions**

Our examination of pretest data identified four questions in Section D that would benefit from being broken into two or more questions or components. These are questions D3, D5i, D16i, and D17e.

***“D3 These next questions refer to the last time you applied for food stamp benefits (MONTH/ YEAR FROM QUESTION D2).***

***When you applied for food stamp benefits in (MONTH/YEAR FROM D2), did you also apply for any other kinds of public assistance such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), AFDC (FILL STATE WELFARE NAME), Medicaid, or General Assistance?***

<b><i>Colorado:</i></b>	<b><i>Colorado Works</i></b>
<b><i>Massachusetts:</i></b>	<b><i>Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children</i></b>
<b><i>Minnesota:</i></b>	<b><i>MFIP Minnesota’s Family Investment Program</i></b>
<b><i>North Carolina:</i></b>	<b><i>Work First Benefits</i></b>
<b><i>Pennsylvania:</i></b>	<b><i>TANF</i></b>
<b><i>Texas:</i></b>	<b><i>TANF</i></b>

***YES ..... 01***

***NO..... 02***

***DON’T KNOW..... -1***

The objective of this question is simple: to determine whether the FSP application was coordinated with the household's application for other assistance programs. However, the question as presently worded is long and complex. Several respondents asked interviewers to repeat the question and/or clarify it. Automated "fills" of the date and program names under CASI administration will handle some problems. However, the question could be further improved by separately asking about the four main programs that one may potentially apply for at the same time when applying for food stamps. The revised question would read as follows:

***"D3 When you applied for food stamp benefits in (MONTH/YEAR FROM D2), did you also apply for AFDC (FILL STATE WELFARE NAME)?"***

<b><i>Colorado:</i></b>	<b><i>Colorado Works</i></b>
<b><i>Massachusetts:</i></b>	<b><i>Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children</i></b>
<b><i>Minnesota:</i></b>	<b><i>MFIP Minnesota's Family Investment Program</i></b>
<b><i>North Carolina:</i></b>	<b><i>Work First Benefits</i></b>
<b><i>Pennsylvania:</i></b>	<b><i>TANF</i></b>
<b><i>Texas:</i></b>	<b><i>TANF</i></b>

***YES ..... 01***

***NO..... 02***

***DON'T KNOW..... -1***

***D3a When you applied for food stamp benefits, did you also apply for Supplemental Security Income?"***

***YES ..... 01***

***NO..... 02***

***DON'T KNOW..... -1***

*D3b When you applied for food stamp benefits did you also apply for General Assistance?*

*YES ..... 01*

*NO..... 02*

*DON'T KNOW..... -1*

*D3c When you applied for food stamp benefits did you also apply for Medicaid?*

*YES ..... 01*

*NO..... 02*

*DON'T KNOW..... -1*

Respondents also had difficulty with Question D5i:

*“D5: Which of the following reasons led you to apply for food stamp benefits in (MONTH/ YEAR FROM QUESTION D2)?*

*.....*

*D5i: You learned about the program or your eligibility for food stamp benefits?”*

Respondents had difficulty with Question D5i because it combined two concepts: (1) learning about the program, and (2) learning that one’s household was eligible for food stamps. Interviewer-respondent interaction on this question was high. We suggest revising Question D5i so that it reads as follows:

*“D5: Which of the following reasons led you to apply for food stamp benefits in (MONTH, YEAR FROM QUESTION D2)?*

*.....*

*D5i: You learned about the existence of the Food Stamp Program?*



***D5j: You found out you may be eligible for the Food Stamp Program?***

***D5k: Some other reason (SPECIFY)”***

This same fix would also apply to Question D16i.

Question D17 asks current participants about various attitudes and other circumstances that might have helped them decide to participate in the FSP, such as inability to get by without food stamps or whether they got a lot of help with the application process:

***“D17. Now I would like to talk to you about some things that may have helped you decide to use food stamp benefits.***

.....

***D17e: Are you uncomfortable getting food from family, friends, charities, or other programs?”***

There are two problems with D17e. Not all respondents have family or friends they potentially could ask for food. For respondents who do not have family or friends, it simply does not make sense to ask them whether they are uncomfortable approaching these individuals for help. Second, the question combines two different types of sources of help: family and friends on the one hand and charities and other formal programs on the other. The following revision addresses these issues:

***“D17. Now I would like to talk to you about some things that may have helped you decide to use food stamp benefits.***

.....

***D17e: Are you uncomfortable getting food from charities or other programs?”***

*D17f: Do have family or friends close-by that you could approach for food?*

*YES.....01*

*NO.....02 ----> SKIP TO D18*

*D17g: Are you uncomfortable asking these family members or friends for food?*

*YES.....01*

*NO.....02*

## **5. Section E: Reasons for FSP Nonparticipation**

The objective of the questions in Section E of the main questionnaires is to ask nonparticipant respondents directly why they do not currently participate in the FSP. Respondents are first asked, in a series of closed-ended questions, whether a specific factor was a reason they did not participate (Questions E1a to E1p). After each question, the respondent was then asked whether it was an important reason they do not receive food stamps (Questions E2a to E2p). After all potential reasons are explored and the respondent is given an opportunity to identify any other reasons that were not asked about by the interviewer, the interviewer then asks the respondent to identify the most important reason (Question E4). The remainder of Section E includes more detailed questions about particular reasons for nonparticipation given in E1. For example, respondents answering that they think they are not eligible for food stamps (E1b) are asked why they think they are ineligible (E7), whether someone told them they are not eligible, and if so, who told them and when (E8, E8a, and E8b), or whether they think they are ineligible because they know someone like them who is ineligible (E8c). Section E is included in the nonparticipant questionnaires only. Both the long and short versions of the questionnaire contain the complete section.

Overall, Section E of the questionnaires worked well. However, respondents had some difficulties with a few of the questions. The problematic Section E questions and recommended revisions are

discussed below. Because Section E contains several complex skip patterns based on responses to E1-series questions, using a hard-copy instrument was difficult and time-consuming for interviewers. Administration of Section E would be greatly simplified, and fewer interviewer errors made, if it were administered by CASI.

**a. Recommended Revisions to Question Grid E1 through E4**

Respondents had difficulty with two questions in the E1-series. Question E1c asks respondents: ***“Do you think it would be hard to get to the food stamp office?”*** Respondents who did not know where to go or who to contact in order to apply for food stamp benefits had some difficulty with this question. One possible fix would be only to ask E1c if respondents know where to apply (that is, they respond “yes” on E1a). However, we think access to the food stamp office is sufficiently important that all respondents should be queried on the concept, regardless whether or not they know exactly where to apply. We recommend that the following interviewer instruction be added to Question E1c:

**“E1c INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTION: IF RESPONDENT ANSWERED “DON’T KNOW” to E1a, THEN READ: Typically you must go to the local food stamp office in-person in order to apply for food stamps. Depending on how far you live from the office, you may need to drive, take a taxi or public transportation, or walk, in order to get there.”**

We intended this question to also include difficulties getting to the food stamp office because of constraints related to employment and problems finding care for a dependent in the home. However, when asked in E1p for other reasons that the respondent did not participate, some working nonparticipants reported that an important reason for not using food stamps was that they could not take time off work. To make this question clearer, we recommend that the question be revised as follows:

***“E1c Do you think it would be hard to get to a food stamp office to apply for food stamps because of transportation problems, health problems, difficulty taking time of work, or because of the need to find care for someone in your home.”***

We probe in question E10 for the reason the respondent finds it difficult to get to a food stamp office.

Several respondents asked interviewers to repeat Question E1k:

***“E1k Would you dislike relying on government assistance?”***

Respondents struggled with the meaning of “government assistance.” We recommend revising this question to read as follows:

***“E1k Would you dislike having to rely on the government for assistance?”***

Respondents had difficulty with the E2-series questions asking whether a particular factor that they reported as having some role in their decision not to participate was “an important reason” they did not use food stamps. We have carefully reviewed the benefits and costs of retaining the E2-series questions and recommend that they be dropped from the questionnaire. The E1-series identifies reasons households are not participating in the FSP and E4 provides respondents an opportunity to state what they perceive to be the *most* important reason for not participating. Thus, the value of the E2-series is that it can tell us which of the potentially several reasons identified in the E1-series are the more important ones. But this information comes with a cost. Behavioral coding of the pretest questionnaires indicated that interviewer-respondent interaction for E2-series questions was “medium” or “high” for approximately half of respondents (10 of 20). Several of respondents asked the interviewer to either clarify or repeat one or more of the E2-series questions. In addition, the E2-series took several minutes to administer. This is because the interviewer needs to repeat the question: ***“Is this an important reason you don’t use food***

*stamp benefits?*” each time a respondent gives a response consistent with a reason for nonparticipation in E1. Knowing which of several reasons given by respondents are the more important ones is not worth increasing the length of the interview and risking the loss of interest and focus in the survey. Also, as we will show in Chapter IV, the distribution of responses to the questions about the important reasons that the respondent did not participate is similar to that of the responses to the questions about whether the factor played any role in the decision to participate. This suggests that the E2-series does not add much to our understanding of the reasons for nonparticipation.

The literature review and focus groups we conducted prior to our preparing the study questionnaires revealed that some participants believed that, as current and/or former taxpayers, they were entitled to receive food stamps (McConnell and Nixon 1996; Ponza and McConnell 1997). Both participants and nonparticipants are asked a question to assess whether they have this attitude (nonparticipants are asked this in Question E19 and participants are asked this in Question D17c). Behavioral coding revealed an excessive amount of respondent-interviewer interaction to this question. Several respondents asked for clarification or for the interviewer to repeat the question. The problem is the placement of the question in the questionnaire. As the last question in Section E, it is nothing like the other questions in Section E nor the questions that follow in Section F. We recommend moving the question to Section B for nonparticipants, and revising it as follows:

***“B3 Do you think it’s OK for people who have paid taxes to get food stamps?”***

We recommend replacing Question D17c with this question in the participant questionnaires.

Twenty working nonparticipants and nine elderly nonparticipants responded that they had “other” reasons for nonparticipation. In 13 of these cases, the “other” reasons given were reasons that the

respondent had already given. One respondent gave an inability to obtain the necessary documentation as a reason for nonparticipation and one other respondent cited “religious reasons.” The remaining respondents gave nonsensical responses. We do not recommend adding any questions because of these “other” responses.

#### **b. Other Recommended Changes to Section E**

All respondents who said they thought they were ineligible for food stamps, were asked why they thought they were ineligible (Question E7). Three types of responses that were coded as “other-specify” are worth discussion. First, some nonparticipants said that they “did not need food stamps” in response to the question about eligibility. As “lack of need” is not a reason for ineligibility, in any future administration of the survey, interviewers should be instructed to probe for the underlying reason. For example, the interviewer could probe: *“But why do you think you are not eligible? Do you think it is because your income is too high, you have too many assets, or some other reason?”* Second, some nonparticipants thought that they were categorically ineligible. Many of these nonparticipants thought they were categorically ineligible because they worked. Others thought they were categorically ineligible for other reasons, such as there were no children in the household. Third, some respondents thought they were ineligible because they were students. We recommend adding “student,” “categorically ineligible because working,” and “categorically ineligible for some other reason” as additional response categories.

Question E12b asks respondents who thought they would have to wait a long time to be served how long they thought they would have to wait. There were four response categories: 15 minutes or less, 16 to 30 minutes, 31 minutes to one hour, and more than one hour. As more than half the respondents

responded “more than one hour,” we recommend changing the fourth category to “one to two hours” and adding an additional category “more than two hours.”

## **6. Section F: Receipt of Food Assistance from Sources Other Than the FSP**

Section F contains questions about household members’ receipt of food assistance from sources other than the FSP. These sources include: community or senior centers; school breakfast and lunch programs; WIC; friends or relatives; emergency food network sources; through work; or other sources. Most of the questions that appear in Section F were taken from the April Food Security Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS).

Respondents had no trouble with these questions. Interviewer-respondent interaction was normal. No more than one respondent asked the interviewer to clarify or repeat the question on any single question. Section F questions worked well and do not need to be revised in any way.

Section F offers a few possibilities to cut back on the length of the long version of the questionnaire. First, Questions F9 and F10 could be combined into a single question that asks about receipt of food and meals from “emergency sources.” We could delete Question F7 that asks whether the household received food or vouchers to buy food from any other kind of program since the prevalence of this is rare and could be recorded under “food or meals obtained from any other sources we haven’t already mentioned.”<sup>30</sup>

## **7. Section G: Food Security**

Section G of the questionnaires asks about the food security of the respondents’ households. The questions in this section were all taken from the April Food Security Supplement Food Security/Hunger

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<sup>30</sup>Less than 2 percent of respondents received food assistance from any other kind of program.

Core Section of the CPS. The short-version of the questionnaire contained a shorter version of the section, containing approximately half as many questions as the full section.

The food security questions in the main questionnaires appear in other national surveys. For comparability with other findings, it is desirable that the survey, if implemented on a national basis, include the same versions as other surveys. Consequently, we are not recommending that any of the questions be changed. However, the pretest shows that the section is demanding, requiring more interviewer-respondent interaction than typical.

Behavioral coding indicated that interviewer-respondent interaction tended to be in the “medium” range for several Section G questions. This is to be expected given the structure of the questions. Questions in this series typically start with a description of some dimension of food insecurity and then ask respondents whether it is “often true,” “sometimes true,” or “never true” for their household. Respondents sometimes forget what dimension is being asked about by the time the interviewer gets to the end of the question, requiring the interviewer to repeat part or all of the question.

In addition, several of the questions are complex, requiring the respondent to process multiple concepts before articulating an answer. A good example of this is Question G9: ***“In the last 12 months, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn’t enough money for food?”*** Respondents need to think about several things before they can give an answer: (1) did I cut the size of meals?; (2) did I skip meals?; (3) did I do this because there wasn’t enough money for food?; and (4) did I do this at any time in the last year?

Respondents had more difficulty with Question G5 than any other question in the sequence. Question G5 reads as follows:



***“G5 (I/We) relied on only a few kinds of low-cost foods to feed (my/our) (child/the children) because (I was/we were) running out of money to buy food.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for (you/your household) in the past 12 months?***

***Probe: By low-cost food we mean rice, beans, macaroni products, bread, or potatoes, or foods like that.***

***Often true..... 01***

***Sometimes true.....02***

***Never true .....03***

***DON'T KNOW..... -1”***

Respondents in one-quarter of the interviews that were behavioral coded requested that the interviewer either repeat or clarify this question. FNS may want to consider breaking the question into two components, similar to G9/G9a:

***“G5 In the past 12 months, did (you/your household) rely on only a few kinds of low-cost foods to feed (your/your household’s) (child/children) because (you/we were) running out of money to buy food.”***

***Probe: By low-cost food we mean rice, beans, macaroni products, bread, or potatoes, or foods like that.***

***YES ..... 01***

***NO ..... 00 SKIP TO G10***

***DON'T KNOW ..... -1 SKIP TO G10***

***G5a Was that often or sometimes true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?***

***Often true..... 01***

***Sometimes true.....02***

***DON'T KNOW..... -1”***

Finally, the section contains a number of complex skips that require interviewers to process information from previous questions, often combinations of questions, in order to determine which question to ask next. We implemented procedures to facilitate this process in the hard-copy administration of the questionnaire.<sup>31</sup> Despite these procedures, interviewers were prone to make errors in the complex skip logic and the section took several minutes to administer. Some interviewers were also making minor changes when administering certain questions, although they usually did not change the meaning of the questions when doing so. The administration of the instrument would be much quicker and much less prone to interviewer error if done by CASI.

## **8. Section H: Employment History**

Section H obtains detailed information on employment of household members. It asks respondents to report the wage rate and hours worked of each person in the household. It also asks about the current occupation and the work history of the person in the household who works the most hours. Section H appears only in the long versions of both working and elderly household questionnaires. (In all other questionnaires we ask the respondent how many people in the household currently work at a job for pay and whether the respondent works for pay. These questions are in Section A of the questionnaire, however). Most of the Section H questions were adapted from other national surveys, such as the survey developed by MPR for the U.S. Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance study.

Section H questions worked well. There was modest interviewer-respondent interaction prior to the respondent answering questions. There was relatively little missing data. Some respondents had difficulty providing information on the weekly work hours (H2) and wages/salary (H3) of other household members

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<sup>31</sup>Asterisks were placed next to response codes of questions that interviewers would need to reference in order to decide on skip patterns.

because they might not know it precisely. Some respondents were reluctant to give information on their wages or salary and that of other household members. However, many of these individuals provided the information after interviewers reminded them that their responses would be kept confidential and that only aggregate or summary measures would be reported for the entire sample and not the earnings of individual households or family members.

## **9. Section I: Health**

Section I is a short section which collects information on the general health and physical and cognitive functioning of respondents in elderly households only. The questions appearing in this section of the questionnaire were adapted from the questions in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES III) and the 1990 Census of Population. Respondents had no difficulty answering these questions. There was minimal missing data. Interviewer-respondent interaction prior to answering the question for most respondents was “low.” These questions do not need to be changed.

## **10. Section J: Social Supports**

Section J of the main questionnaires asks respondents a series of questions about the length of time they have lived in the neighborhood, the frequency of making social visits or having people to their homes, and whether relatives live close-by. The questions were adapted from NHANES III. Respondents had no problems with these questions.

## **11. Section K: Income and Expenses**

Questions on income and expenses of the respondents’ household are contained in Section K. These questions only appear in the long versions of the working and elderly participant and nonparticipant

questionnaires. Respondents generally did not have difficulty responding to these questions. However, there were a few exceptions.

Questions K3 and K4 ask respondents who own their homes whether their mortgage includes property taxes and insurance:

***“K3 (Do you/Does your household) make a separate home insurance payment?”***

***“K4 (Do you/Does your household) pay a separate property tax bill?”***

Several respondents asked interviewers to repeat these questions. We propose revising both questions so that they get at the underlying issue more directly, as follows:

***“K3 (Do you/Does your household) make a separate home insurance payment or is it included in your mortgage payment?”***

***MAKE A SEPARATE PAYMENT .....01***

***INCLUDED IN MORTGAGE PAYMENT .....02***

***DON'T KNOW .....-1”***

***“K4 (Do you/Does your household) pay a separate property tax bill or is it included in the mortgage payment?”***

***MAKE A SEPARATE PAYMENT .....01***

***INCLUDED IN MORTGAGE PAYMENT .....02***

***DON'T KNOW .....-1”***

A similar criticism applies to Question K5a:

***“K5a (Do you/Does your household) pay separate heating or air-conditioning costs?”***

We recommend that K5a be revised to read:

***“K5a (Do you/Does your household) pay separate heating or air-conditioning costs or are these costs included in your monthly rent payment?”***

***MAKE A SEPARATE PAYMENT .....01***

***INCLUDED IN RENT PAYMENT .....02***

***DON'T KNOW .....-1”***

Respondents had difficulty with question sequence K7b through K9, which asks whether the household contains disabled members or elderly, and, if so, what were the household's out-of-pocket expenses for medical expenses for these individuals. Respondents had difficulty understanding what we meant by “disabled household member.” Our approach entailed asking whether the household contained disabled individuals and then defining what we meant by disability. We believe the preferred way to get at this issue is to ask directly whether the household contains individuals satisfying our definition. Making this change affects other questions in the series. We recommend series K7b through K9 be revised as follows:

***“K7b: Does anyone in the household receive SSI benefits because of a disability, or receive social security disability checks, disability retirement pensions, railroad retirement disability payments, or veteran disability benefits?”***

***YES ..... 01***

***NO ..... 00***

***DON'T KNOW ..... -1***

**K7c Is there anyone in your household who is age 60 or older?**

**YES ..... 01**

**NO ..... 00**

**DON'T KNOW ..... -1**

**K7d INTERVIEWER: CHECK K7b and K7c. IS ANYONE IN THE HOUSEHOLD DISABLED (K7b EQUALS 01) OR AGE 60 OR OLDER (K7c EQUALS 01)?**

**YES ..... 01**

**NO ..... 00 ---> SKIP TO K10**

**K8 Last month, did (you/your household) pay health insurance premiums or make payments to belong to an HMO (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)?**

**PAY HEALTH INSURANCE PREMIUMS ..... 01**

**MAKE PAYMENTS TO BELONG TO AN HMO ..... 02**

**DO NOT MAKE PAYMENTS ..... 00 ---> SKIP TO K9**

**DON'T KNOW ..... -1 ---> SKIP TO K9**

**K8a Now thinking about those individuals receiving disability benefits or are age 60 or older, how much did (you/your household) pay last month for health insurance premiums and payments to belong to an HMO? Please tell me only the amount that you and members of your household pay out-of-pocket.**

**\$/\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/**

**DON'T KNOW ..... -1**

**K8b NO QUESTION THIS VERSION**

**K8c INTERVIEWER: CHECK K7b and K7c. IS ANYONE IN THE HOUSEHOLD DISABLED (K7b EQUALS 01) OR AGE 60 OR OLDER (K7c EQUALS 01)?**

**YES ..... 01**

**NO ..... 00 ---> SKIP TO K10**

**K9 Now think about the people in your household who receive disability benefits or are age 60 or older. Last month how much were their out-of-pocket medical expenses? Please include doctor and hospital bills, prescription drugs, lab tests, or X-rays, and any other medical expenses you paid out-of-pocket. Please exclude anything for which you will be reimbursed.**

**\$/\_\_\_, \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_/**

**DON'T KNOW ..... -1**

One omission from the questionnaire was a question to elicit how many household members were *either* elderly *or* disabled. This information is needed to determine how many people in the household can use the medical deduction. To obtain this information we recommend adding two questions after K7b,

**K7b1 Is any disabled person in your household not elderly?**

**YES ..... 01**

**NO ..... 00 SKIP TO K7c**

**K7b2 How many people in your household are not elderly?**

An interviewer check can be included as K7a so that households containing only elderly persons can skip the questions about disabilities:

***K7a INTERVIEWER CHECK.***

***Is everyone in the household elderly?***

***YES ..... 01 SKIP TO K8***

***NO ..... 00***

K7c could also be an interviewer check.

Question grid K10.1 through K14.11 asks respondents about incomes sources and amounts received by all members in the household. This is a demanding sequence of questions. Behavioral coding of responses indicated interviewer-respondent interaction in the “medium” to “high” range for several respondents for at least one income source or amount. Several respondents needed interviewers to repeat or clarify questions. A few were reluctant to provide information on amounts of income received. However, we do not think we can make this series of questions easier without sacrificing some of the information collected. The administration of this sequence of questions would be greatly improved if it was administered by CASI.

Questions K15 through K17 were designed to provide information to calculate the value of each vehicle owned by household members. Question K15 asks the respondent whether anyone in the household owns a vehicle. Questions K16 asks households with vehicles to provide the year, make, and model of each vehicle (up to three). These data can be used to estimate the value of the vehicles using published data on the prices of used vehicles.<sup>32</sup> If respondents are unable to answer Question K16, respondents are asked in Question K17 for the approximate value of the vehicles.

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<sup>32</sup>Prices of used vehicles are available on several internet sites. To value the vehicles reported in the pretest, we used the internet site: <http://www.autopricing.com>.



Some nonparticipant respondents who reported in the screening interview that no one in their household had any vehicles, were asked about their vehicles again in Question K15. This was because with a hard-copy questionnaire it was too difficult for the interviewer to go back and check the response to the vehicle question in the screening interview before asking K15. Although no respondents complained about this question, we recommend that if the main questionnaire is to be administered by CASI that the vehicle questions are not asked of respondents who report in the screening interview that they have no vehicles.

Some respondents had difficulty answering the question about the year, make, and model of their vehicles (Question K16.). Approximately 20 percent of respondents who owned one or more vehicles either responded that they “didn’t know” or did not provide enough information for us to estimate the value of the household’s vehicles. It may be possible to substantially reduce missing data by inserting probes. For example, several respondents knew the year and make, but not the model of the vehicle. In a CATI survey, the computer could be programmed to insert a probe that helped respondents recall the model. Respondents sometimes gave the make instead of the “model.” Again, in a CATI survey, the computer could be programmed to not accept this answer, prompting the interviewer to re-ask the question.

Even when respondents answered Question K16, we did not receive enough information to make an accurate determination of the vehicle price. No respondent in the pretest gave the exact model of the vehicle. In nearly all cases, the respondents gave a one-word answer such as “Camry” or “Corolla.” However, there are many versions of each model. For example, in 1990 there were seven versions of the Toyota Camry, ranging from an average retail price of \$3,650 for the Base Sedan to \$5,950 for the LE

ALL-TRAC Sedan 4-speed AT.<sup>33</sup> The prices also vary with the condition of the vehicle and any nonstandard equipment it may have.

We recommend dropping question K17 that probes for the value of the vehicle. We believe that respondents who do not know the year, make, and model of a vehicle are unlikely to know the approximate value of the vehicle. In the pretest, the instructions to the interviewers were to ask about the value of the vehicles only if information on all the household vehicles was missing. If FNS wishes to retain this question, the instructions should be changed so that the interviewers ask about each vehicle for which there is any missing data on year, make, or model of a vehicle.

## **12. Section L: Demographic Information**

Questions that obtain information on the demographic characteristics of the respondent, such as age, race/ethnicity, education, marital status, and citizenship appear in Section L. Respondents had little difficulty with these questions. Review of the 40 questionnaires subject to behavioral coding showed no more than one or two respondents asked for clarification or for the interviewer to repeat the question for each question. Interviewer-respondent interaction prior to answering was consistently “low” for all questions in this section. No item had more than 5 percent nonresponse most items had nonresponse in the 1 to 2 percent range.

## **E. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS**

Overall, the main questionnaires worked well and were well-received by respondents. The overall completion rate for the mixed-mode survey questionnaire, once a household was determined eligible by the screening process, was approximately 85 percent. The overall *response rate* for the pretest survey,

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<sup>33</sup>Obtained from the internet site: <http://www.autopricing.com>

when one takes into account the screening interview completion rate, was 51 percent. Questionnaire completion rates varied by interview mode: they were substantially higher for questionnaires administered by telephone than in-person (88 percent versus 70 percent). Many of the respondents who refused to complete an in-person interview reported that they would have completed the interview if they had been surveyed over the telephone. For households with telephones, this suggests that the best strategy for fielding the questionnaires on a national level would be by telephone. Completion rates were lower for longer versions of the questionnaires.

We recommend that the requirement that the respondent to the main questionnaire is *the* person who would or did apply for food stamps be relaxed to *any* adult in the household who *might* apply for food stamps. This would increase the likelihood that the respondent to the main questionnaire would be the same person who is administered the screening questionnaire. We expect that this would raise the completion rates to the main questionnaires and we would still talk with someone knowledgeable about the household's experiences and decision-making.

For telephone interviews, the "long" version of the questionnaire took on average 26 minutes to administer and the "short" version 15 minutes. In-person interviews took approximately 10 minutes longer to administer in each case. In addition, many respondents, especially elderly ones, complained about the length of the long version of the questionnaires. We recommend a final version of the questionnaire slightly shorter than the long versions of the questionnaire used in the pretest. We recommend ways to shorten the long questionnaires in the next chapter.

The main questionnaires were difficult to administer using hard-copy because of complicated skip patterns and fills. It would be much more efficient to administer the entire survey by CASI; administering the main questionnaire by CASI could shorten the length of the interview. We administered the main

questionnaire using hard copy in the pretest to avoid the cost of programming the instruments for such a small sample. We recommend that CASI be used for both the screening interviews and the main questionnaires, should the survey be implemented nationally.

As expected, respondents had difficulty with some questions. However, most of these problems can be remedied by revising questions. In most cases the revisions are straightforward: change a word or phrase, simplify language, sharpen probes, include probes as part of the question, add interviewer instructions, or expand response categories. Some fixes will require adding questions or breaking a complex question into two or more questions or components.

#### **IV. THE INFORMATION COLLECTED BY THE QUESTIONNAIRES**

The questionnaires were designed so that if administered on a larger, national scale they would enable FNS to collect sufficient data to ascertain the reasons working and elderly households have low rates of FSP participation. Care was taken to ensure that FNS would have sufficient information to be able to assess whether the low rates of FSP participation are a cause for concern and, if they are, be able to recommend the necessary policy changes. This chapter assesses the ability of the questionnaires to collect sufficient information about the reasons for nonparticipation to make policy recommendations.

The pretest provided information on the experiences and attitudes of samples of FSP participants and nonparticipants from working and elderly households residing in ten U.S. counties. Because the samples were purposively selected and the sample sizes are small, it is *not* appropriate to use the data to make inferences about the reasons households containing working and elderly members do not participate in the FSP nationally. However, we do present some of the findings from the pretest in this chapter for two reasons. First, doing so illustrates the breadth of information that would be obtained from fielding the survey on a national level. Second, it provides an opportunity to assess whether the questionnaires collect the appropriate data. By carrying out some descriptive and comparative analyses and displaying results, we will be able to determine whether there are specific topics or questions that need to be added and/or superfluous questions that may be deleted.

The chapter is organized into six sections. Section A provides an overview of research objectives and questions that may be addressed with data collected from the main questionnaires and describes the analytic approaches to address them. Section B discusses how information from the long questionnaires can be used to make a better prediction of FSP eligibility than was made by the screening interview. Section C shows the range of analyses and findings on the reasons reported by respondents from working and elderly

households for not participating in the FSP. Section D demonstrates how the characteristics and experiences of participants and nonparticipants may be compared to gain additional insight into the reasons some working and elderly households participate while others do not. Section E compares the data collected by mode of interview administration. Finally, Section F summarizes our main findings and discusses their implications for a survey of nonparticipation that would be administered on a larger scale.

## **A. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND ANALYTIC APPROACHES**

We designed the questionnaires to allow two lines of inquiry into the reasons for nonparticipation: (1) a direct approach--asking persons who were probably eligible for food stamps why they did not participate in the FSP, and (2) an indirect approach--making statistical comparisons of the characteristics and experiences of FSP participants and nonparticipants that can be used to infer reasons for nonparticipation.

Data collected from the questionnaires would support a broad-based analysis of FSP nonparticipation by working and elderly households that, at a minimum, would enable FNS to address the following specific research questions:

1. What reasons are given by FSP-eligible nonparticipants for not participating in the FSP?
2. Do the reasons given for nonparticipation differ for working and elderly households?
3. How do the characteristics and past experiences of nonparticipants who give certain reasons for nonparticipation differ from those who do not give the reasons?
4. How do the characteristics of FSP participants differ from those of nonparticipants?
5. What past experiences have participants and nonparticipants had with the FSP that may have affected their household's decision to participate?
6. Do participants have certain attitudes, motivations, or resources that nonparticipants do not have that enable them to overcome perceived barriers to FSP participation?

7. Are the low participation rates by working and elderly households a cause for concern? If so, for which subgroups?
8. What program or policy changes are needed to increase participation by working and elderly households?

Three types of analysis could be conducted with the data collected from the questionnaires:

1. ***Descriptive tabular analyses.*** These involve presenting means and frequencies of the characteristics or past experiences of either FSP nonparticipants or participants, and of the reasons given for nonparticipation (nonparticipants only).
2. ***Comparative tabular analyses.*** These involve comparing means and frequencies of characteristics or past experiences of (1) FSP-eligible nonparticipants and FSP participants or (2) different subgroups of nonparticipants, such as nonparticipants who give a specific reason for nonparticipation.
3. ***Multivariate regression analyses.*** These involve regressing outcomes, such as the household's decision whether to participate in the FSP or specific reasons reported for nonparticipation, on individual and household characteristics, attitudes, and past experiences with the FSP.

## **B. INFORMATION TO DETERMINE FSP ELIGIBILITY**

The RDD screening interview was designed to screen out respondents that are not eligible for the FSP. However, because the screening interview needs to be short, some ineligible respondents will still pass the tests in the screening interview and be administered a main questionnaire. Including respondents who are ineligible for food stamps in samples of FSP-eligible nonparticipants will bias the findings on the reasons for nonparticipation. For example, respondents who are ineligible are more likely to say they do not need food stamps and that they think (correctly) they are ineligible.

The long versions of the questionnaires included questions on income by source, expenses required to determine net income, vehicles, and citizenship information. This information can be used to better ascertain whether nonparticipants in the sample are likely to be eligible for the FSP. We chose not to ask

any questions about financial assets other than the ones in the screening interview, because questions about financial assets are lengthy, sensitive, and difficult to answer. Because of the time constraints, we did not collect information on income, expenses, vehicles, or citizenship on the short questionnaires.

In analyzing the data from the national survey, the sample should be restricted to only those that are determined FSP eligible based on the more detailed information about income, expenses, and vehicles. We found in the pretest samples that over one-third of nonparticipants who passed the screening interview were found to be ineligible based on data collected by the main questionnaires. Because so many households were found ineligible based on the more detailed income, expense, and vehicle information, it is important that this information is collected in any survey on nonparticipation. Also, in designing a national survey, the sample sizes should be inflated to take into account that most of the analyses of nonparticipation will be conducted on only respondents that are determined eligible for food stamps using the more detailed available income, expense, and vehicle data.

As over 40 percent of working nonparticipant households reported in the main questionnaires usual wage rates and weekly hours worked that would be inconsistent with a monthly household income below 130 percent of poverty, we recommend adding an additional question and an interviewer check after the existing earnings questions in the main questionnaires. After the respondent has given the “usual” hours worked and hourly wage rate, we would ask whether each working household member worked these hours over the past month. If they reply that they did not, we would ask how many hours in total they worked over the past month. Using CASI, the computer could calculate the implied monthly household earnings from the previous responses. If the total earnings exceeds 130 percent of poverty, the interviewer could ask the respondent to reconcile the reported earnings with the reported monthly income in the screening interview.



## **C. REASONS REPORTED BY RESPONDENTS FOR NOT PARTICIPATING IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM**

The most obvious way to collect information on the reasons for nonparticipation is to ask FSP-eligible nonparticipants directly why they do not participate in the program. The questionnaires ask nonparticipants about their participation decisions in two ways. First, each nonparticipant questionnaire includes a section that asks respondents directly about reasons they currently do not participate. Second, the questionnaires ask nonparticipants who had received food stamps sometime in the previous three years why they had stopped participating in the program; nonparticipants who had begun the FSP application process but not completed it, why they did not complete it; and nonparticipants who had received food stamps but not used them, why they had not used them.<sup>34</sup> The rest of this section discusses the information collected from these two sets of questions.

### **1. Reasons for Currently Not Participating in the FSP**

Previous surveys have found that when asked in one or two questions why they do not participate, respondents tend to give answers that are too vague to use as a basis for policy recommendations (McConnell and Nixon 1996). To avoid this, the questionnaires ask a series of structured closed-ended questions about the reasons for nonparticipation.

We begin by asking whether the respondent had heard of food stamps or the FSP before the survey (Question B0).<sup>35</sup> If they had not heard of food stamps or the FSP, we assumed that this was the most

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<sup>34</sup>Questions about why the respondent did not complete the application process and why they did not use food stamps they received are also asked of participants.

<sup>35</sup>This question was not included in the short versions of the questionnaires.

important reason why they did not participate and did not ask the respondent any more questions about the reasons why they did not participate.

For respondents who had heard of food stamps or the FSP, for 15 separate reasons, we asked the respondents whether the reason was applicable to them, and if it was, whether it was an important reason they did not participate. At the end of this series of questions, we asked whether there were any other reasons for their nonparticipation that we had not covered. We then asked which was the most important reason they did not participate.

The reasons for nonparticipation fall into five broad categories:

1. ***Lack of information***, including an unawareness of the existence of the FSP, lack of knowledge about where or how to apply for food stamps, and misperceptions about eligibility.
2. ***Perceived lack of need***, including a perception that the respondent “could get by” without food stamps, the belief that other households are more deserving, and a belief that the respondent’s need is only temporary.
3. ***Size of the FSP benefit*** is so low that the respondent does not think it is worthwhile to apply for food stamps.
4. ***Program features and administration*** including the complexity of the application process, problems getting to the FSP office, program requests for personal information, and perceptions of discourteous staff and unpleasant offices.
5. ***Psychological reasons*** including the stigma related to applying for and using food stamps, an attitude of not wanting help from the government, or the belief that family and friends would not be supportive of the decision to participate.

Table IV.1 presents the responses to these questions about nonparticipation given by the nonparticipants in the pretest. The findings presented in Table IV.1 and other tables in this chapter are illustrative and should not be used as a basis on which to make inferences about the reasons for nonparticipation. The columns entitled “Applicable Reason” in Table IV.1 show the percentage of

TABLE IV.1

REASONS REPORTED BY NONPARTICIPANTS FOR NOT PARTICIPATING IN THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM<sup>a</sup>

Reason	Percent of Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>					
	Working			Elderly		
	Applicable Reason	Important Reason	Most Important Reason	Applicable Reason	Important Reason	Most Important Reason
<b>Lack of Information</b>						
Don't know FSP exists <sup>c</sup>	2 <sup>d</sup>	2 <sup>d</sup>	2 <sup>d</sup>	7 <sup>e</sup>	7 <sup>e</sup>	7 <sup>e</sup>
Don't know where to go or who to contact to apply	36	9	2	46	8	2
Don't think eligible for FSP benefits	41	29	11	33	23	7
<b>Perceived Lack of Need</b>						
Can get by on my own without FSP benefits	79	73	24	84	55	25
Feel others need FSP benefits more	80	52	13	75	50	14
Need is only temporary	63	36	5	30	16	3
<b>Expected FSP Benefits Too Low</b>						
Think eligible for only a low benefit amount	45	24	5	35	23	8
<b>Problems Related to Program Administration</b>						
Hard to get to FSP office	11	6	3	25	13	3
Application process is too long and complicated	23	12	3	27	15	2
Questions are too personal	21	8	2	24	16	2
FSP office staff are disrespectful	24	15	4	9	3	1
FSP office is unpleasant or unsafe	12	7	2	14	9	2

TABLE IV.1 (Continued)

Reason	Percent of Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>					
	Working			Elderly		
	Applicable Reason	Important Reason	Most Important Reason	Applicable Reason	Important Reason	Most Important Reason
<b>Psychological Reasons</b>						
Other family members or friends would not approve of respondent receiving food stamps	11	5	0	1	1	0
Feel embarrassed applying for FSP benefits	25	14	3	27	14	2
Would feel embarrassed using FSP benefits	16	12	1	25	18	2
Dislike relying on the government for assistance	44	29	3	37	21	3
<b>Other Reasons</b>	5	10	1	7	4	1
No reason given	12	12	12	14	14	14
Missing data	0	0	1	0	0	2
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>126</b>

NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Data in this table should not be used to make inferences about the reasons households do not participate in the FSP nationally. Because the data were collected in a pretest, the samples are small and not nationally representative.

<sup>b</sup>Includes nonparticipants who, based on information collected in the main questionnaire, were probably ineligible for food stamp benefits.

<sup>c</sup>This is the percentage of nonparticipant respondents to the long questionnaires who said they had not heard of food stamps or the FSP before we interviewed them. These respondents were not asked about the reasons they did not participate; it was assumed that they were not participating because they were unaware of the existence of the program. For these respondents, we counted an unawareness of the FSP as both an “important reason” and “the most important reason” for not participating.

<sup>d</sup>Three percent of the nonparticipants administered long questionnaires responded that they had not heard of food stamps or the FSP.

<sup>e</sup>Twelve percent of the nonparticipants administered long questionnaires reported that they had not heard of food stamps or the FSP.

nonparticipants reporting that a given reason has at least some role in the decision not to participate. The columns entitled “Important Reason” show the percentage of nonparticipants reporting that the reason was an important factor. The columns entitled “Most Important Reason” show the percentage of nonparticipants who report, after all reasons have been discussed, that the reason is the most important reason why they do not participate in the program. To maintain sufficient sample sizes, the data presented in Table IV.1 and the other tables in the chapter do not exclude respondents that we determined were not eligible for food stamps.

All the reasons for nonparticipation asked about in the questionnaire were relevant. For each of the 16 reasons we asked about, the reason was applicable for more than 5 percent of all respondents. We do not recommend removing any of the direct questions about the reasons for nonparticipation (Questions E1a to E1p).

The most frequently cited reasons for nonparticipation by respondents from both working and elderly households were related to a perceived lack of need for food stamps. Substantial proportions of nonparticipants gave “can get by on my own,” “feel others need food stamps more,” and “need is only temporary” as reasons for nonparticipation. Because of the frequency that reasons related to a lack of need for nonparticipation are given, it is important that a questionnaire about nonparticipation include questions to ascertain:

- C Whether the lack of need is real or whether the respondent has a need that they do not admit to, perhaps because of embarrassment or other factors
- C If the respondent does not need food stamps, whether this is because they receive food assistance from other sources.

Hence, it is important that the questionnaire include questions about both food security and sources of other food assistance.

A belief that they are ineligible for food stamps is an important reason working and elderly households do not participate in the program. This underlines the importance of collecting data to determine whether the households are correct in their belief that they are ineligible. We also recommend retaining the follow-up questions that ask why respondents think they are ineligible and whether they were told by someone in a FSP office that they were ineligible, and if they were, how long ago they were told.

We asked in the long questionnaires whether the respondent had heard of food stamps or the FSP before they were interviewed for the pretest. We included this question in the long questionnaire only. We were surprised to find that 12 percent of respondents from elderly households asked this question reported that they did not know about the existence of the FSP.<sup>36</sup> This is an important enough reason that the question should be included in any questionnaire about the reasons for nonparticipation.

The pretest findings shown in Table IV.1 highlight the importance of asking respondents for “the most important reason for not participating” from among the factors that play a role in the decision not to participate. Over 70 percent of all nonparticipants gave more than one reason for not participating. Asking the respondent for the most important reason provides some information about the importance of each reason. As an example, 45 percent of nonparticipants from working households expect that they are eligible for only a small amount of benefits, and nearly 24 percent cite this as a reason they do not participate, but only 5 percent say it is the most important reason they do not participate.

The findings in Table IV.1 also confirm that it is not necessary to ask respondents whether a given factor was an “important reason” they did not participate (Question sequence E2a through E2p). The

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<sup>36</sup>These nine respondents comprise 7 percent of all elderly nonparticipants interviewed.

distributions for whether the reason was applicable and “whether it was an important reason” are similar for most reasons. We recommend deleting sequence E2a through E2p from the questionnaire since its inclusion does not add much information.

**a. Characteristics of Pretest Nonparticipants Giving Particular Reasons for Currently Not Participating in the FSP**

To obtain a deeper understanding of the reasons for current nonparticipation, both descriptive tabular analysis and logit regression analysis can be used to assess whether some reasons are more important than others for certain subgroups of nonparticipants. First, *comparative tabular analysis* can be used to contrast the characteristics and past experiences of nonparticipants who give a particular reason for nonparticipation with those of nonparticipants who do not give it as a reason. It is also useful, but not essential, to provide the distribution of the characteristics of FSP participants as a benchmark.

*Logit regression* can be used to identify subgroups of nonparticipants most likely to give particular reasons for nonparticipation. Using the example above, variables such as age, gender, education level, whether the respondent had previously received food stamps, the physical and cognitive functioning of the respondent, and other characteristics and experiences are included in the regression equations as independent variables. The difference between the tabular and logit analyses is that the latter identifies the independent effect that a given respondent characteristic or experience has on the likelihood of giving a particular reason for nonparticipation, controlling for other measured respondent characteristics and experiences.

Figure IV.1 summarizes some of the key characteristics and experiences that could be considered in the tabular and regression analyses designed to explain how various reasons for nonparticipation differ across nonparticipants, assuming that data will be collected using the long

FIGURE IV.1

ANALYSES OF REASONS FOR FOOD STAMP PROGRAM NONPARTICIPATION BY  
KEY CHARACTERISTICS AND EXPERIENCES OF NONPARTICIPANTS

<p><b>Dependent variable: “Don’t know about existence of the FSP”</b></p> <p><b>Key Characteristics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C Don’t know anyone who applied for FSP benefits</li> <li>C Had not received food stamps as a child (long version only)</li> <li>C Had not applied in the past</li> <li>C Education</li> <li>C Cognitive functioning (long version, elderly only)<sup>a</sup></li> <li>C Age, gender, race/ethnicity</li> <li>C Citizenship (long version only)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dependent variable: “Don’t know where or who to contact about how to apply for FSP benefits”</b></p> <p><b>Key Characteristics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C Don’t know anyone who applied for FSP benefits</li> <li>C Had not received food stamps as a child (long version only)</li> <li>C Had not applied in the past</li> <li>C Education</li> <li>C Cognitive functioning (long version, elderly-only)</li> <li>C Age, gender, race/ethnicity</li> <li>C Citizenship (long version only)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dependent variable: “Don’t think eligible for FSP benefits”</b></p> <p><b>Key Characteristics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C Have been found ineligible in past</li> <li>C Amount of FSP benefit (expected)</li> <li>C Income (long version only)</li> <li>C Home ownership (long version only)</li> <li>C Vehicle ownership (long version only)</li> <li>C Presence of working person (working only)</li> <li>C Age, gender, and race/ethnicity</li> <li>C Citizenship (long version only)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dependent variable: “Can get by on my own without FSP benefits” or “Feel others need food stamp benefits more than me”</b></p> <p><b>Characteristics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C Whether food secure (more measures available on long version than short version)</li> <li>C Whether receive food assistance from other sources (long version only)</li> <li>C Whether have social supports (long version only)</li> <li>C Household composition (more details in long version)</li> <li>C Whether believe others need food assistance more than their household does</li> <li>C Whether receive benefits from other government programs, such as SSI (long version only)</li> <li>C Income (long version only)</li> <li>C Age, gender, race/ethnicity</li> <li>C Citizenship (long version only)</li> </ul>



FIGURE IV.1 (continued)

<p><b>Dependent variable: “Need is only temporary”</b></p> <p><b>Characteristics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C Whether think will be working at same job three months from now (long version only)</li> <li>C Earning more or less three months from now (long version only)</li> <li>C Measures of stability of job (long version only)</li> <li>C Whether believe others need food stamps more than their household does</li> <li>C Age, gender, race/ethnicity</li> <li>C Citizenship (long version only)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dependent variable: “FSP benefits are too low”</b></p> <p><b>Characteristics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C Potential benefits <sup>a</sup></li> <li>C Expected benefits <sup>b</sup></li> <li>C Perceive it is hard or costly to get to food stamp office</li> <li>C Perceive application process is long and complicated</li> <li>C Age, gender, race/ethnicity</li> <li>C Citizenship (long version only)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dependent variable: “Hard to get to the FSP office”</b></p> <p><b>Characteristics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C Whether live in rural area</li> <li>C Whether own vehicle (long version only)</li> <li>C Whether have physical mobility limitations</li> <li>C Whether need to take time off work</li> <li>C Whether lose pay when apply</li> <li>C Whether have health problems (long version, elderly only)</li> <li>C Whether have dependents in household</li> <li>C Age, gender, race/ethnicity</li> <li>C Citizenship (long version only)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dependent variable: “Application process too long and complicated”<sup>a</sup></b></p> <p><b>Characteristics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C Cognitive functioning (long version, elderly only)</li> <li>C Whether have health problems (long version, elderly only)</li> <li>C Whether have past experience applying for food stamps and perceived there to be problems with application process</li> <li>C Age, race/ethnicity, and gender</li> <li>C Citizenship (long version only)</li> <li>C Education</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dependent variable: “Questions too personal”<sup>a</sup></b></p> <p><b>Characteristics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>C Household composition (more details in the long version)</li> <li>C Amount and sources of income (long version only)</li> <li>C Age, race/ethnicity, and gender</li> <li>C Citizenship (long version only)</li> <li>C Education</li> </ul>

FIGURE IV.1 (*continued*)

<p><b>Dependent variable: “FSP office staff disrespectful”</b></p> <p><b>Characteristics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊆ Age</li> <li>⊆ Urban vs. rural location</li> <li>⊆ Income (long version only)</li> <li>⊆ Race/ethnicity</li> <li>⊆ Gender</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dependent variable: Psychological reasons for nonparticipation</b></p> <p><b>Characteristics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊆ Age, gender, race/ethnicity</li> <li>⊆ Whether received food stamps as a child</li> <li>⊆ Education</li> <li>⊆ Income (long version only)</li> <li>⊆ Residential location (urban vs. rural)</li> <li>⊆ Whether participated in the past</li> </ul>

NOTES:

<sup>a</sup> Analyses depicted above assume that data will be collected using the long versions of the questionnaires. If FNS opts for the shorter versions, then not all of the subgroups or independent variables can be constructed and included in the comparative tabular and regression analyses. We have noted in the table those variables available only in the long version of the questionnaires.

<sup>b</sup> The amount of benefits the respondent would receive if they participated in the FSP. It is calculated from household size and income information collected in the questionnaires.

<sup>c</sup> The amount of benefits the respondent thinks they would get if they participated in the FSP.

versions of the questionnaires. Not all of the subgroups or independent variables can be constructed and included in the comparative and regression analyses if the short versions of the questionnaires are used. We have noted in the figure those variables available only in some versions of the questionnaires.

Table IV.2 illustrates how we would present the tabular analysis for the reasons related to a lack of need for food stamps. We present some distributions of characteristics of all participants, all nonparticipants, and all nonparticipants who give one or more of three reasons related to a lack of need (“can get by on my own,” “others need them more,” or “my need is only temporary”) as the most important reason for nonparticipation. Similar analyses could be performed for nonparticipants who gave a lack of need as an applicable factor.

The food security questions in the questionnaires can be used to construct a “food security” scale.<sup>37</sup> Households are classified as either food secure or falling into one of three categories of food insecurity: food insecure without hunger, food insecure with moderate hunger, and food insecure with severe hunger.

Of the nonparticipants from working households who reported that they did not receive food stamps for a reason related to a lack of need, a significant proportion seem to be food insecure. These pretest findings emphasize the importance of collecting food security data.

Respondents who are food insecure over a 12-month period may not be food insecure over a shorter period. For example, respondents may have been food insecure six months ago, but since then, they have had sufficient food. Hence, we cannot conclude that respondents who perceive they don’t currently need food stamps are *currently* food insecure based on the data collected by the questionnaires. Given the policy relevance of the food security questions, we recommend that the questions cover a shorter period

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<sup>37</sup>This replicates the index used by Hamilton et al. (1997).

TABLE IV.2

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF NONPARTICIPANTS WHO REPORTED THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT REASON FOR  
NONPARTICIPATION WAS RELATED TO A LACK OF NEED FOR FOOD STAMPS<sup>a</sup>  
(Percentage Distributions)

	Working			Elderly		
	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>		Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>	
		All Nonparticipants	Nonparticipants Who Gave it as the Most Important Reason <sup>c</sup>		All Nonparticipants	Nonparticipants Who Gave it as the Most Important Reason <sup>c</sup>
<b>Food Security<sup>d</sup></b>						
Food secure	33	47	65	69	77	92
Food insecure without hunger	28	27	23	22	15	4
Food insecure with moderate hunger	22	11	3	9	1	0
Food insecure with severe hunger	0	6	5	0	3	0
Missing <sup>e</sup>	17	10	5	0	4	4
<b>FSP Participation History</b>						
Received FSP benefits in past three years	100	19	11	100	10	6
Applied for benefits in past three years	100	19	7	100	6	2
Relatives, friends, neighbors, or coworkers receive FSP benefits	27	24	21	8	11	11

TABLE IV.2 (Continued)

	Working			Elderly		
	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>		Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>	
		All Nonparticipants	Nonparticipants Who Gave it as the Most Important Reason <sup>c</sup>		All Nonparticipants	Nonparticipants Who Gave it as the Most Important Reason <sup>c</sup>
Family received FSP benefits when respondent was child	54	36	31	22	26	11
<b>Age of Respondent</b>						
Less than 30	34	33	39	1	3	2
31 to 59	60	58	53	12	13	11
60 to 69	0	2	1	39	34	32
70 to 79	3	2	3	39	29	32
80 and older	0	0	0	8	18	21
Missing data	3	5	4	1	2	2
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	11	29	33	19	27	30
Female	89	71	67	81	73	70

TABLE IV.2 (Continued)

	Working			Elderly		
	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>		Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>	
		All Nonparticipants	Nonparticipants Who Gave it as the Most Important Reason <sup>c</sup>		All Nonparticipants	Nonparticipants Who Gave it as the Most Important Reason <sup>c</sup>
<b>Education</b>						
Primary or less	5	3	5	15	18	17
Some high school	15	20	21	32	25	17
High school	58	41	41	36	39	47
Vocational degree	0	2	0	0	2	4
One to three years of college	15	20	21	11	9	6
At least 4 years of college	6	12	11	3	5	8
Other	0	1	0	3	1	0
Missing data	1	1	0	1	2	2
<b>Citizenship</b>						
Household all U.S. citizens	91	89	90	97	100	100
Household includes some non U.S. citizens	6	5	2	0	0	0
No citizens in household	3	6	8	3	0	0

TABLE IV.2 (Continued)

	Working			Elderly		
	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>		Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>	
		All Nonparticipants	Nonparticipants Who Gave it as the Most Important Reason <sup>c</sup>		All Nonparticipants	Nonparticipants Who Gave it as the Most Important Reason <sup>c</sup>
<b>Difficulty Managing Money</b>						
No difficulty	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	72	78	88
Some difficulty	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	22	15	12
A great deal of difficulty	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	6	5	0
Unable to do	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0	1	0
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>53</b>

## NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Data in this table should not be used to make inferences about the characteristics of these nonparticipants nationally. Because the data were collected in a pretest, the samples are small and not nationally representative.

<sup>b</sup>Includes nonparticipants who, based on information collected in the main questionnaire, were probably ineligible for food stamp benefits.

<sup>c</sup>All nonparticipants who reported that the most important reason for nonparticipation was either that they could get by on their own, that other people needed food stamps more than they did, or that their need was only temporary.

<sup>d</sup>Coded from the long questionnaires only.

<sup>e</sup>Most of the missing data was a result of interviewer error administering the complex skip logic.

n.a. = not asked

of time. The CPS used both a 12-month and 30-day time period. We recommend changing the time frame from “12-months” to the “past 30 days” in future administrations of the questionnaires.

**b. Additional Data on Underlying Reasons for Nonparticipation**

For six of the potential reasons for nonparticipation, the questionnaires ask additional follow-up questions about the underlying reasons for nonparticipation. Additional details are asked about the reasons respondents thought:

1. ***Their household was ineligible.*** Respondents were asked why they thought they were ineligible. They were also asked about how they arrived at that perception--whether staff at a FSP office told them they were ineligible, and if so, when they were told, whether someone at another program thought they were ineligible, or whether they formed that opinion based on the circumstances of someone they knew who was like them.
2. ***It was hard or costly to get to the food stamp office to apply.*** In a series of closed-ended questions, respondents were asked why they thought it would be hard to get to the food stamp office. Specific reasons asked about include: transportation difficulties or expenses, physical difficulties, difficulties getting time off work, loss of pay when visiting the FSP office, and the need to care for someone in their home.
3. ***The application process was too long and complicated.*** In a series of closed-ended questions, respondents were asked whether they thought they would have to wait a long time to be served, whether they thought the application *form* was too long and complicated, and whether they thought it would be difficult to get all the necessary paperwork. For those who said they thought they would have to wait a long time, the questionnaires asked how long they thought they would have to wait.
4. ***The FSP office is an unpleasant place.*** Respondents were asked in closed-ended questions whether they thought the office was unpleasant because of the inside of the building, the other people in the waiting room, or because of the neighborhood the office was in.
5. ***The benefits they were entitled to receive are too low.*** Respondents who thought the benefits were too small were asked whether they were told they were eligible for only a small amount of benefits by someone at a food stamp office, and if they were, how long ago they were told this; whether they were told they were eligible for only a small amount of benefits by someone at another program; and whether they based their opinion on a comparison with someone else they knew who was like them. We also asked all nonparticipants who thought



they were eligible for food stamps the amount of food stamp benefits they thought they were eligible for.

6. *The questions on the application form were too personal.* In an open-ended question, respondents were asked what types of questions they thought were too personal.

Tables IV.3 through IV.8 provide examples of how these data can be summarized.

In a large-scale survey, for most reasons for nonparticipation, there would probably be a sufficient number of respondents who say that the reason is applicable to be able to analyze the responses to the more detailed questions about the reasons. More than 10 percent of nonparticipants would be asked each of these more detailed questions. For all questions except those that follow-up on the reasons why it is hard or costly to get to the food stamp office, more than 20 percent of nonparticipants are asked the questions. We do not recommend dropping the questions about why the FSP office is an unpleasant place because they provide information useful to the FSP.

Given that so many respondents gave reasons related to a lack of need for food stamps, we recommend that a future survey would include closed-ended follow-up questions about this perceived lack of need. For example, it may be informative to ask whether they don't need food stamps because they receive food assistance from family or friends, because they receive other benefits, or because they go without medications or paying bills.

## **2. Reasons Current Nonparticipants Stopped Receiving Food Stamps, Started But Did Not Complete an FSP Application, and Received But Did Not Use Food Stamps**

Additional perspective can be gained on the reasons some households do not participate in the FSP by examining any previous experience nonparticipants may have had with the program. So that the respondents can recall their experiences, we ask about only the previous three years. Section C of the nonparticipant questionnaires provides information on the reasons former participants stopped



TABLE IV.3  
REASONS NONPARTICIPANTS THINK THEY ARE INELIGIBLE<sup>a</sup>  
(Percentage Distributions)<sup>b</sup>

Reason for Perception	Nonparticipants Who Thought They Were Ineligible or Did Not Know If They Were Eligible <sup>c</sup>	
	Working	Elderly
Income too high	73	41
Assets too high	4	4
Missing or incomplete paperwork	0	0
Do not meet citizenship requirements	0	0
Do not satisfy work requirements	0	1
On strike from job	0	0
Student	1	0
Thinks they are categorically ineligible because they work	6	3
Thinks they are categorically ineligible for some other reason <sup>d</sup>	8	6
Other <sup>e</sup>	15	21
Don't know	7	27
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>78</b>

NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Data in this table should not be used to make inferences about the reasons nonparticipants think they are ineligible nationally. Because the data were collected in a pretest, the samples are small and not nationally representative.

<sup>b</sup>Totals exceed 100 percent because respondents could give multiple responses.

<sup>c</sup>Includes nonparticipants who, based on information collected in the main questionnaire, were probably ineligible for food stamp benefits.

<sup>d</sup>Includes persons who said they did not know why they were categorically ineligible.

<sup>e</sup>Nearly all these responses did not appropriately answer the question. For example, when asked why they thought they were not eligible, some respondents answered "I don't need food stamps."

TABLE IV.4

REASONS NONPARTICIPANTS THINK IT IS HARD OR COSTLY  
TO GET TO THE FSP OFFICE<sup>a</sup>  
(Percentage Distributions)<sup>b</sup>

Reason for Perception	Nonparticipants Who Thought It Would be Hard or Costly to Get to the FSP Office <sup>c</sup>	
	Working	Elderly
Difficult or expensive to get transportation	45	55
Physical difficulties/mobility limitations	55	72
Difficult to take time off from work/school	50	3
Would lose pay going to the food stamp office	35	14
Would have to arrange for someone to take care of someone in your home	25	14
Don't know the location of the FSP office	0	3
Concerns about safety	0	3
Other	1	0
Don't know	0	7
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>29</b>

## NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Data in this table should not be used to make inferences about the reasons nonparticipants think it is hard or costly to get to the FSP office nationally. Because the data were collected in a pretest, the samples are small and not nationally representative.

<sup>b</sup>Totals exceed 100 percent because respondents can give multiple responses.

<sup>c</sup>Includes nonparticipants who, based on information collected in the main questionnaire, were probably ineligible for food stamp benefits.

TABLE IV.5

REASONS NONPARTICIPANTS THINK THE FSP APPLICATION  
PROCESS IS TOO LONG AND COMPLICATED<sup>a</sup>  
(Percentage Distributions)<sup>b</sup>

Reason for Perception	Nonparticipants Who Thought the Application Process Was Too Long and Complicated <sup>c</sup>	
	Working	Elderly
Have to wait a long time to be served	73	56
Thought would have to wait: <sup>d</sup>		
15 minutes or less	0	5
16-30 minutes	7	16
31 minutes to one hour	35	11
More than one hour	59	42
Don't know	0	26
Application form too long and complicated	71	74
Difficult to get all the necessary paperwork	49	61
Application process too long	2	0
Disabilities	0	6
Other	0	3
Don't know	0	3
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>31</b>

## NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Data in this table should not be used to make inferences about the reasons nonparticipants think the FSP application process is too long and complicated nationally. Because the data were collected in a pretest, the samples are small and not nationally representative.

<sup>b</sup>Totals exceed 100 percent because respondents can give multiple responses.

<sup>c</sup>Includes nonparticipants who, based on information collected in the main questionnaire, were probably ineligible for food stamp benefits.

<sup>d</sup>Calculated only for the respondents who thought they would have to wait a long time to be served.

TABLE IV.6

REASONS NONPARTICIPANTS THINK THE FSP OFFICE IS UNPLEASANT OR UNSAFE<sup>a</sup>  
(Percentage Distributions)<sup>b</sup>

Reason for Perception	Nonparticipants Who Perceive the FSP Office As Unpleasant or Unsafe <sup>c</sup>	
	Working	Elderly
Inside of building is physically unpleasant	38	31
Don't like waiting with the other applicants	29	37
FSP office is in unsafe neighborhood	43	56
Staff are unpleasant or disrespectful	19	19
Lack of parking	0	6
Other	10	19
Don't know	5	6
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>16</b>

## NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Data in this table should not be used to make inferences about the reasons nonparticipants think the FSP office is unpleasant or unsafe nationally. Because the data were collected in a pretest, the samples are small and not nationally representative.

<sup>b</sup>Totals exceed 100 percent because respondents can give multiple responses.

<sup>c</sup>Includes nonparticipants who, based on information collected in the main questionnaire, were probably ineligible for food stamp benefits.

TABLE IV.7

SOURCES OF PERCEPTIONS OF ELIGIBILITY FOR ONLY SMALL BENEFIT<sup>a</sup>  
(Percentage Distributions)

Source of Perception	Nonparticipants Who Think They are Eligible for a Small Benefit Amount <sup>b</sup>	
	Working	Elderly
Someone at the FSP office told the respondent that his/her household was eligible for only small amount	14	37
Told by FSP staff: <sup>c</sup>		
Within last 3 months	10	7
Between 3 and 12 months ago	36	27
More than one year ago	45	66
Don't know/missing	9	0
Told by someone at another program that the household was ineligible	3	2
Thought eligible for small amount because know someone like them that receives only a small amount of benefits	14	17
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>41</b>

## NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Data in this table should not be used to make inferences about the reasons some households think they are eligible for only a small benefit amount nationally. Because the data were collected in a pretest, the samples are small and not nationally representative.

<sup>b</sup>Includes nonparticipants who, based on information collected in the main questionnaire, were probably ineligible for food stamp benefits.

<sup>c</sup>Distribution calculated for only those respondents who were told by the FSP office that they were eligible for a small amount of food stamp benefits.

TABLE IV.8

REASONS NONPARTICIPANTS THINK THE FSP APPLICATION IS TOO PERSONAL<sup>a</sup>  
(Percentage Distributions)<sup>b</sup>

Questions/Subjects That are Too Personal	Nonparticipants Who Think The FSP Application Is Too Personal <sup>c</sup>	
	Working	Elderly
Composition of household <sup>d</sup>	17	18
Citizenship	3	0
Disabilities	3	0
Resources/assets	39	21
Income sources <sup>e</sup>	33	29
“FSP wants to know everything about one’s life”	0	11
Other	17	25
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>28</b>

## NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Data in this table should not be used to make inferences about the reasons nonparticipants think the FSP application is too personal nationally. Because the data were collected in a pretest, the samples are small and not nationally representative.

<sup>b</sup>Totals exceed 100 percent because respondents can give multiple responses.

<sup>c</sup>Includes nonparticipants who, based on information collected in the main questionnaire, were probably ineligible for food stamp benefits.

<sup>d</sup>The child’s father’s residence was frequently cited as especially personal by respondents in nonelderly households.

<sup>e</sup>Whether the household receives child support payments was frequently cited as especially personal by respondents in nonelderly households.



receiving food stamp benefits; Section D provides data on the reasons individuals who contacted the FSP office or began the application process did not complete an application. It also asks respondents who applied for and were found eligible to receive food stamps why they did not use their food stamps.

The percentages of nonparticipants who have had previous experiences with the FSP are reported in Table IV.9. About 19 percent of respondents from working households and 10 percent of elderly respondents had received food stamps in the previous three years. Thus the sample sizes of nonparticipants who have previously received food stamps in a national survey would be large enough to support an analysis of the these nonparticipants' experiences with the FSP.

The samples of nonparticipants who, in the previous three years, began an application for food stamps without completing it are smaller, comprising only 6 percent of respondents from working households and 1 percent of respondents from elderly households. A further 2 percent of respondents from working households and 2 percent of respondents from elderly households had contacted the FSP office but not completed the application. We recommend dropping the questions about why persons who have been found eligible for food stamps did not use them as only 2 percent of respondents from working and elderly households had not used food stamps they had received.

We illustrate how we would present data on the reasons nonparticipants stopped receiving food stamps in Table IV.10. The questionnaires contain questions that would allow a more in-depth examination of the reasons former participants discontinued participation. For those saying they were told they were ineligible by FSP staff, we can examine the reasons they were found ineligible. We can also examine when they were told they were ineligible. This is relevant because if nonparticipants were told they were no longer eligible many months ago, it is possible that their circumstances may have changed and they are now eligible. Similarly, we can examine the

TABLE IV.9  
NONPARTICIPANTS' FSP EXPERIENCES OVER THE PREVIOUS THREE YEARS<sup>a</sup>  
(Percent Distributions)

Experience	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>	
	Working	Elderly
<b>Applications</b>		
Have contacted FSP office to ask about benefits, but did not apply	2	2
Have begun the application process but did not complete it	6	1
Have completed the application process	19	6
Have completed the application process but was found ineligible	7	1
Have been found eligible but did not use food stamps	2	1
<b>Participation</b>		
Have received food stamp benefits <sup>c</sup>	19	10
Have stopped receiving food stamps because found ineligible	7	8
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>126</b>

NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Data in this table should not be used to make inferences about FSP nonparticipants nationally. Because the data were collected in a pretest, the samples are small and not nationally representative.

<sup>b</sup>Includes nonparticipants who, based on information collected in the main questionnaire, were probably ineligible for food stamp benefits.

<sup>c</sup>The percentage of households receiving food stamps is not necessarily equal to the percentage completing applications because the household may have been found ineligible at the application or the application may have occurred more than three years ago.

TABLE IV.10

REASONS REPORTED BY NONPARTICIPANTS FOR DISCONTINUING  
FOOD STAMP RECEIPT IN THE PREVIOUS THREE YEARS<sup>a</sup>  
(Percentage Distributions)<sup>b</sup>

Reason Stopped Receiving Food Stamps	Working	Elderly
<b>Not Eligible</b>		
Notified by the FSP that no longer eligible	33	33
<b>Perceived Ineligibility</b>		
Thought no longer eligible for FSP benefits	50	21
<b>Perceived Lack of Need</b>		
Thought no longer needed food stamps	23	25
Thought situation would improve	5	0
Other people needed them more	0	0
<b>FSP Benefits Too Low</b>		
Think not worth the effort to continue participating because benefit level is too low	14	25
<b>Program Features and Administration</b>		
Hard to get to FSP office to do paperwork to continue receiving benefits	0	13
Process needed to go through to continue to receive benefits too long and complicated	5	13
Questions needed to answer to continue to receive benefits too personal	0	13
Not treated well by FSP staff	5	0
Office is very unpleasant	0	0
Office located in an unsafe neighborhood	0	13

TABLE IV.10 (*Continued*)

Reason Stopped Receiving Food Stamps	Working	Elderly
<b>Stigma</b>		
Other family members no longer approved of respondent receiving food stamps	0	0
Felt embarrassed using food stamp benefits	0	0
Did not like relying on government for assistance	0	0
<b>Other Reasons<sup>c</sup></b>	32	8
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>12</b>

## NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Data in this table should not be used to make inferences about the reasons nonparticipants discontinued food stamp receipt nationally. Because the data were collected in a pretest, the samples are small and not nationally representative. The nonparticipants include nonparticipants who, based on information collected in the main questionnaire, were probably ineligible for food stamp benefits.

<sup>b</sup>Percentages sum to more than 100 percent because respondents could give more than one reason for discontinuing FSP participation.

<sup>c</sup>The majority of “other reasons” given by respondents had to do with the household’s failure to comply with FSP rules or staff requests or an increase in the household’s income that meant they were no longer eligible.

reasons respondents who said they thought they were no longer eligible felt that they were ineligible. For respondents who said they quit participating because benefits were too low, we can tabulate the amount of benefits they reported receiving the last month of their food stamp spell.

Data on the reasons why some nonparticipants had begun the application but not completed it, and the reasons why some nonparticipants received food stamps but did not use them could be presented in tables similar to Table IV.10.

#### **D. COMPARISONS OF CHARACTERISTICS AND EXPERIENCES OF FSP PARTICIPANTS AND NONPARTICIPANTS**

The analyses described in the previous section are based on the direct reports by respondents about why they did not participate in the FSP. The questionnaires also collect information on the characteristics and experiences of both FSP participants and nonparticipants. This allows a more indirect approach to analyzing the reasons for nonparticipation--comparing the characteristics and experiences of participants and nonparticipants. The remainder of this section discusses how the questionnaires allow a comparison of participants and nonparticipants on (1) personal and household characteristics; (2) past experiences with the FSP; and (3) attitudes and other factors that may facilitate or hinder program participation.

##### **1. Comparisons of Characteristics of Participants and Nonparticipants**

Data from the questionnaires will support comparisons of FSP participants and nonparticipants across several personal and household characteristics. Table IV.11 provides an example of simple descriptive tabular comparisons of participants and nonparticipants for selected demographic characteristics and the receipt of food assistance from other sources. The distributions are presented

TABLE IV.11

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANT AND NONPARTICIPANT HOUSEHOLDS<sup>a</sup>  
(Percentage Distributions)

Characteristic	Working		Elderly	
	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>
<b>Respondent Characteristics</b>				
<b>Age</b>				
Less than 30	27	32	0	2
30 to 59	67	59	14	14
60 to 69	0	2	39	34
70 to 79	3	2	39	29
80 and older	0	0	8	19
Missing data	3	5	1	2
Mean	34	37	66	67
Median	33	36	68	69
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	11	29	19	27
Female	89	71	81	73
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
Nonhispanic Black	38	32	31	27
Nonhispanic White	48	49	61	65
Hispanic	8	12	5	5
Other	5	3	3	1
Missing data	0	4	0	2
<b>Education</b>				
Primary or less	5	3	15	18
Some high school	15	20	32	25
High school	57	41	36	39
Vocational training program certificate	0	2	0	2
Some college	15	20	11	9
Two-year or four-year college degree	6	12	3	5

TABLE IV.11 (Continued)

Characteristic	Working		Elderly	
	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>
Other	0	0	3	1
Missing data	1	1	1	2
<b>Marital Status</b>				
Married or living as married	34	37	7	27
Divorced/separated	28	25	34	37
Widowed	4	6	36	18
Never been married	34	35	24	18
<b>Household Characteristics</b>				
<b>Household Size</b>				
1 person	0	15	73	52
2	16	27	10	29
3	23	21	10	10
4	14	15	1	5
5 or more	47	23	5	5
Mean	4.5	3.2	1.6	1.9
Median	4	3	1	1
<b>Children Present</b>				
Yes	90	59	13	14
No	10	41	87	85
<b>Citizenship<sup>c</sup></b>				
Household members all U.S. citizens	91	89	98	97
Household includes some members who are non U.S. citizens	6	4	1	0
No members of household are U.S. citizens	3	7	1	3
<b>Receipt of Food Assistance from Other Sources</b>				
Congregate or home-delivered meals	0	0	4	5
Day-care or Head Start program	11	3	0	4

TABLE IV.11 (*Continued*)

Characteristic	Working		Elderly	
	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>
School Lunch Program	36	12	4	5
School Breakfast Program	26	8	1	2
Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program	23	8	1	1
Vouchers to get food	7	3	3	1
Food or money for food from friends or relatives	12	15	7	9
Emergency food from church or food pantry	12	7	11	8
Emergency food from soup kitchens	1	1	0	2
Meals from work	5	3	0	0
Food from garden	8	8	5	10
Food from animals raised by respondent	0	3	0	1
Food from hunting or fishing	8	7	1	6
Other sources	0	2	1	2
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>126</b>

## NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Data in this table should not be used to make inferences about the characteristics of FSP participant and nonparticipant households nationally. Because the data were collected in a pretest, the samples are small and not nationally representative.

<sup>b</sup>Includes nonparticipants who, based on information collected in the main questionnaire, were probably ineligible for food stamp benefits.

<sup>c</sup>Calculated for respondents to long versions of the questionnaires only.



separately for working and elderly participants and working and elderly nonparticipants. The characteristics of the respondents that we could present in tables similar to Table IV.11 and the rationale for collecting data on these characteristics are described below.

**a. Demographic Characteristics**

Both the long and the short questionnaires contain questions on demographic characteristics. All questionnaires ask about the age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and marital status of respondent. The screening interviews collect information on household size. The long questionnaires also contain a full household roster that asks the age and relationship to the respondent of everyone in the household. They also ask about the citizenship of household members.

Comparing demographic characteristics of participants and nonparticipants may be informative because some potential reasons for nonparticipation may be related to household composition. For example, respondents with less education may find it difficult to find out about the program and how to apply. Households with children may be more likely to participate because adults may be willing to go without food but not willing for their children to do so. Household size may be important for two reasons: smaller households are eligible for lower benefits than larger households, but they face the same costs of applying for and obtaining food stamps; second, larger households can buy food at a lower unit cost, hence, food stamps may be of greater value to them than to smaller households.

**b. Economic Characteristics**

Economic characteristics are collected in the long questionnaires only. The characteristics collected by the questionnaires include: the amount and sources of household income, including earnings; medical expenses for elderly/disabled members of household; dependent-care expenses; home ownership; and

vehicle ownership. There are at least two reasons for nonparticipation to be connected to the household's total income and other economic resources. First, households with greater resources may perceive that they do not need food stamps. Second, such households may not know that they are eligible or may believe that they are ineligible.

While data on vehicle ownership and expenses are collected mainly to make a determination of FSP-eligibility for nonparticipants, we also collected these data for participants. The rationale for collecting these data was that there may be interesting differences between participants and nonparticipants. We believe that these data are of secondary importance, and the questions on expenses and vehicle ownership could be dropped from the *participant* questionnaires.

### **c. Receipt of Food Assistance Other Than Food Stamps**

Only the long versions of the questionnaires collected data on other sources of food assistance. Types of other food assistance asked about include: congregate or home-delivered meals (elderly households only); free or reduced priced breakfasts or lunches from School Breakfast, National School Lunch, or day care or HeadStart programs; food through the WIC or other programs; meals or food from food pantries, food banks, or soup kitchens; food or meals from friends or relatives; and food or meals received as part of employment. Comparisons of the receipt of food assistance from sources other than food stamps between participants and nonparticipants may provide information about whether nonparticipants have less of a need for food stamps than participants because they have access to more sources of food assistance and whether access to one food assistance program facilitates access to another.

#### **d. Food Security**

The responses to questions about Food Security, in both the long and short versions of the questionnaires, can be used to determine whether the respondent's household is food secure, and if not, the degree of food insecurity. Comparisons of food security between participants and nonparticipants may shed light on whether respondents who say they do not need food stamps are food secure and, more generally, whether those who do not participate are in need of food assistance.

#### **e. Characteristics of Employment**

Information on employment is collected by both the working and elderly long questionnaires. No information on employment is collected by the short questionnaires except how many persons in the household work and whether the respondent works. The elderly long questionnaire only collects information on earnings for each member of the household. As well as information on earnings, the long working questionnaires also collect information on:

- C The occupation of the principal earner in the household<sup>38</sup>
- C How long the principal earner has been working at his or her present job
- C How likely it is that the principal earner will still be at the same employment in three months
- C Whether the principal earner expects his or her earnings to change
- C The number of different jobs held by the principal earner in the past year
- C The number of months the principal earner was unemployed over the past year

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<sup>38</sup>The person in the household who works the most number of hours per week.

Each of these pieces of information provides some information on the stability of employment. One difference between participants and nonparticipants may be that nonparticipants have more stable employment. Persons who have employment that is likely to end shortly may be more likely to participate than persons with the same income who have more stable employment.

**f. Health Characteristics**

Only the long elderly questionnaires collect information on the respondent's self-assessed health status and cognitive and physical functioning. Questions related to health were included because it is sometimes argued that elderly persons have low participation rates because of health problems that make it difficult for them to apply for and/or use benefits.

**g. Social Supports**

Questions on the social supports available to the respondent are included in all the long questionnaires. Three questions are asked to assess the extent of the social supports available to the respondent. These collect information on the:

- Ⓒ Length of time the respondent has lived in his or her neighborhood
- Ⓒ Frequency the respondent meets with friends
- Ⓒ Distance from the respondent's nearest relative

These characteristics are included because social supports, by indicating the extent to which family and friends can act as a safety net to the respondent, may be an important factor in determining participation.

## **h. FSP Benefit Level**

Data on the actual amount of food stamp benefits received by participants are collected in the screening interviews. Using data collected by the long questionnaires, we can also estimate the amount of food stamp benefits nonparticipants *would* receive if they participated (the potential benefits). Using these data, we can compare the benefits of participants with the benefits of nonparticipants to see whether nonparticipants on average would receive a smaller benefit than participants.

## **2. Comparisons of Participant and Nonparticipants on Their Past Experiences with the FSP**

If issues related to the administration of the FSP are reasons why some persons eligible for food stamps do not participate, we might expect participants and nonparticipants to have different experiences with the FSP. The questionnaires ask both participants and nonparticipants about their experiences applying for and using food stamps over the past three years.

For respondents who have previously completed an application form for food stamps, we can compare their experiences applying and using food stamps along the following dimensions:

- C Reasons the respondent applied for food stamps or contacted the FSP office
- C The logistics of applying for food stamps: where the respondent filed the application form; whether the respondent applied for other benefits at the same time; whether the respondent applied or whether an authorized representative applied for him or her; where the certification interview was held; whether the respondent took time off work to apply; the types of help with the application process the respondent received; and whether the help with the application was received from FSP staff or others
- C Whether the respondent has been found ineligible in the previous three years, and the reasons he or she was found ineligible
- C Experiences and difficulties applying, such as being treated disrespectfully by FSP staff; difficulties meeting FSP caseworkers; losing wages from missing work; and feeling humiliated applying for food stamps

- Ⓒ Experiences and difficulties receiving or using food stamps, such as being treated disrespectfully by store personnel or other customers
- Ⓒ Whether the respondents changed their shopping habits or other actions so that people would not find out they received FSP benefits

We illustrate how these participant and nonparticipant experiences would be tabulated in Tables IV.12 and IV.13.

In the pretest, nonparticipants who did not complete an application form were not asked the full sequence of questions about their experiences applying (Questions D4a through D7k). However, these people may have had particular difficulties with the application process. Hence, we recommend asking all nonparticipants who have contacted the FSP or begun an application form the full sequence of questions about their experiences with the application process. In the pretest, these questions were skipped for the 4 percent of nonparticipants who had begun an application form but not completed it.

For those individuals who in the recent past have contacted the FSP but never applied, applied but did not complete the application, or who have been found eligible but did not use food stamps, we can compare FSP participants and nonparticipants on the:

- Ⓒ Reasons they did not complete an application form after contacting the FSP
- Ⓒ Reasons they did not complete the application process
- Ⓒ Reasons they were found ineligible at application
- Ⓒ Reasons households found eligible did not use food stamps

TABLE IV.12

SELECTED EXPERIENCES OF RESPONDENTS WHEN APPLYING FOR FOOD STAMPS<sup>a</sup>  
 (Percentage distribution of households applying for food stamps during the past three years)

Experience	Working		Elderly	
	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>
Difficult or expensive getting transportation to the FSP office	15	21	13	*
Health or disability made it difficult to get to FSP office	15	33	24	*
Difficult to take time off work to apply for food stamp benefits	19	12	1	*
Lost wages when took time off work to apply for food stamps	19	27	1	*
Needed to arrange for dependent care to apply for food stamps	21	15	3	*
Had to wait a long time to be served at the food stamp office	31	55	17	*
Food stamp office staff were disrespectful	16	27	11	*
Application form was too long and complicated	21	33	20	*
Caseworker asked questions that were too personal	4	18	11	*
It was difficult to get all the necessary paperwork for the application	26	39	16	*
Felt embarrassed having to apply for food stamps	27	45	15	*
Missing data	3	0	1	*
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>7</b>

NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Data in this table should not be used to make inferences about the experiences of households applying for food stamps nationally. Because the data were collected in a pretest, the samples are small and not nationally representative.

<sup>b</sup>Includes nonparticipants who, based on information collected in the main questionnaire, were probably ineligible for food stamp benefits.

\* = insufficient number of cases to calculate distribution.

TABLE IV.13

SELECTED EXPERIENCES OF RESPONDENTS USING FOOD STAMPS<sup>a</sup>  
(Percentage distribution of respondents participating in the FSP during the previous three years)

Experience	Working		Elderly	
	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>b</sup>
Sometimes treated disrespectfully by either employees or other customers when using food stamp benefits in stores	29	21	17	17
Embarrassed to use food stamp benefits	16	18	12	33
Had difficulties obtaining monthly food stamp benefits	10	15	8	17
Felt needed food stamps to make it through the month	96	97	92	92
Had difficulties doing all the paperwork needed to keep getting food stamps	21	36	20	25
Had difficulties arranging meetings with caseworker at convenient times	22	39	12	25
Sometimes treated disrespectfully by food stamp office staff	27	42	8	17
Other	7	15	8	8
Missing data	0	0	1	8
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>12</b>

NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Data in this table should not be used to make inferences about the experiences of households using food stamps nationally. Because the data were collected in a pretest, the samples are small and not nationally representative.

<sup>b</sup>Includes nonparticipants who, based on information collected in the main questionnaire, were probably ineligible for food stamp benefits.



The percentages of respondents who would answer the questions about the reasons for not completing the application and not using food stamps are small (see Table IV.9). Hence, we caution that questions about the reasons respondents did not complete the application process should only be included if the sample sizes are large enough to support the comparisons of these reasons between participants and nonparticipants. As noted in Section C, as so few nonparticipants in either working or elderly households did not use food stamps after being found eligible, we recommend dropping the questions about the reasons respondents did not use food stamps.

### **3. Comparisons of Participants and Nonparticipants on Factors that May Influence Barriers to FSP Participation**

The questionnaires ask participants and nonparticipants who have previously applied for food stamps about factors that helped them overcome real or perceived barriers to participation. These factors include:

- Ⓒ They had lots of help with the FSP application process
- Ⓒ Family and friends were supportive of the decision to participate
- Ⓒ They feel it is alright to receive FSP benefits because they pay taxes
- Ⓒ They need FSP benefits or they won't have enough to eat
- Ⓒ They are uncomfortable getting food from family, friends, charities, or other food assistance programs

Table IV.14 illustrates how the findings about factors that influence barriers to participation could be presented.

The question about the role of family and friends in the decision to participate is worded differently in the participant and nonparticipant questionnaires. Participants were asked “Did other family members or friends encourage you to get food stamp benefits?” whereas nonparticipants were

TABLE IV.14

FACTORS THAT MAY HELP POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS OVERCOME  
BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION<sup>a</sup>  
(Percent Distribution of Households)<sup>b</sup>

Factor	Working		Elderly	
	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>c</sup>	Participants	Nonparticipants <sup>c</sup>
Had lots of help with application process	15	12 <sup>d</sup>	33	43 <sup>d</sup>
Family and friends were (would be) supportive of decision to participate <sup>e</sup>	26	83	16	91
Feel it's O.K. to receive FSP benefits because pay taxes	63	67	67	52
Need FSP benefits or won't be able to get enough food	60	21	60	16
Was (would be) uncomfortable getting food from family, friends, charities, or other programs	47	28	17	n.a.
Other	11	n.a.	15	n.a.
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>126</b>

## NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Data in this table should not be used to make inferences about the factors that help participants overcome barriers to participation nationally. Because the data were collected in a pretest, the samples are small and not nationally representative.

<sup>b</sup>Totals do not add to 100 percent because respondents can indicate that more than one factor helped them overcome barriers to participation.

<sup>c</sup>Includes nonparticipants who, based on information collected in the main questionnaire, were probably ineligible for food stamp benefits.

<sup>d</sup>Only nonparticipants who completed FSP applications within the past three years were asked this question.

<sup>e</sup>This question was worded differently for participants and nonparticipants. Participants were asked "Did other family members or friends encourage you to get food stamp benefits?" whereas nonparticipants were asked "Would other family members or friends discourage you from using food stamps?"

n.a. = question not asked

asked “Would other family members or friends discourage you from using food stamp benefits?” Because of the differences between the wording of the questions, direct comparisons should not be made between the responses of participants and nonparticipants. To allow the comparison, we recommend that participants are asked the same question as nonparticipants.<sup>39</sup>

## **E. COMPARISON OF FINDINGS BY ADMINISTRATION MODE**

In the pretest 15 percent of the interviews were administered in-person. We found no significant differences in the responses to questions by mode of administration. Table IV.15 presents the reasons reported by nonparticipants for not participating in the FSP by whether the interview was administered by telephone or in-person. The distributions of reported reasons are similar for each mode of administration.

## **F. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS**

This chapter illustrated the depth of information that could be obtained from fielding the questionnaires nationally. The questionnaires, incorporating the recommended revisions identified in this chapter and Chapter III, would collect a wealth of information about the reasons for nonparticipation.

### **1. Recommended Modifications to the Questionnaires**

The chapter indicated some questions that could be added, some that could be dropped, and some that could be changed:

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<sup>39</sup>We recommend that question D17b be deleted and that a question “Did other family members or friends discourage you from using food stamp benefits?” be added as C14h in the participant questionnaires.

TABLE IV.15

REASONS REPORTED BY NONPARTICIPANTS FOR CURRENTLY NOT PARTICIPATING  
IN THE FSP, BY INTERVIEW MODE<sup>a</sup>  
(Percentage Distributions)

Reason	Nonparticipants Who Reported Reason as Applicable <sup>b</sup>	
	Telephone	In-Person
<b>Lack of Information</b>		
Don't know FSP exists	8	0
Don't know where to go or who to contact	42	29
Don't think eligible for food stamps	37	47
<b>Perceived Lack of Need</b>		
Can get by on my own without FSP benefits	82	75
Feel others need FSP benefits more	78	81
Need is only temporary	50	47
<b>Expected FSP Benefits Too Low</b>		
Think eligible for only a low benefit amount	43	31
<b>Problems Related to Program Administration</b>		
Hard to get to FSP office	17	14
Application process is too long and complicated	24	25
Questions are too personal	23	17
FSP office staff are disrespectful	18	22
FSP office is unpleasant or unsafe	13	11
<b>Psychological Reasons</b>		
Other family members or friends would not approve of respondent receiving food stamps	7	8
Would feel embarrassed applying for FSP benefits	27	19

TABLE IV.15 (Continued)

Reason	Nonparticipants Who Reported Reason as Applicable <sup>b</sup>	
	Telephone	In-Person
Would feel embarrassed using FSP benefits	20	31
Dislike relying on the government for assistance	40	47
<b>Other Reasons</b>	9	14
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>24</b>

## NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Data in this table should not be used to make inferences about the reasons households do not participate in the FSP nationally. Because the data were collected in a pretest, the samples are small and not nationally representative.

<sup>b</sup>Includes nonparticipants who, based on information collected in the main questionnaire, were probably ineligible for food stamp benefits.

- C A question about whether the respondent had ever heard of food stamps or the FSP before the survey interview should be included in all questionnaires about the reason for nonparticipation.
- C It is not necessary to include the series of questions that ask whether a reason is an important reason why a respondent did not participate (Questions E2a to E2p) if the respondent is asked for *the most* important reason why he or she does not participate.
- C The questions about food security should refer to a 30-day period rather than a 12-month period.
- C Follow-up questions should be added for nonparticipants who give a reason related to a lack of need for food stamps, such as whether the respondents do not need food stamps because they receive food assistance from family or friends, because they receive other benefits, or because they go without medications or paying bills.
- C Questions about the reasons why some people who are found eligible for food stamps do not use them should be deleted as they are applicable to less than 2 percent of nonparticipants from working or elderly households.
- C The nonparticipant questionnaires should ask all respondents who have contacted or begun the application process about their experiences applying for food stamps.
- C Questions about whether the workers in the household worked their “usual” hours over the past month should be added to the questions on earnings. Interviewer checks for whether the earnings exceed 130 percent of poverty should also be included.
- C The questions about expenses and vehicles could be deleted from the participant questionnaires.

## **2. The Information Obtained from the Direct Questions Will Be More Informative than the Information Obtained from Comparisons between Participants and Nonparticipants**

An analysis of the responses to the direct questions about why nonparticipants do not participate will yield sufficient information on which to base policy recommendations. In contrast, comparisons of participants and eligible nonparticipants yield findings that are suggestive of reasons for nonparticipation but rarely provide evidence that a specific reason is important.

### **3. The Long Versions of the Questionnaires Could Be Shortened**

We believe that FNS could get a wealth of information about the reasons for nonparticipation from a questionnaire slightly shorter than the long versions used in the pretest. The shortening would help raise response rates and reduce survey costs. Specifically, we recommend revising the long-version of the questionnaires to exclude:

- Ⓒ Questions indirectly related to the respondent's knowledge of the FSP, such as whether the family ever received food stamps when the respondent was a child and whether any relatives, friends, neighbors, or coworkers receive food stamps
- Ⓒ Questions about employment, other than earnings
- Ⓒ Questions about health and cognitive and physical functioning
- Ⓒ Questions about social supports, such as how long the respondent has lived in the neighborhood

These questions collect interesting information, but the information is less informative about the reasons for nonparticipation than the other more direct questions about the reasons for nonparticipation. If collected, we would use the information to compare the characteristics of participants and nonparticipants, and the characteristics of nonparticipants who give different reasons for nonparticipation. However, it is difficult to infer reasons for nonparticipation from these types of comparisons--most differences between participants and nonparticipants would be consistent with more than one reason for nonparticipation. We think that a questionnaire without these questions could yield sufficient information to make policy recommendations.

We expect that a questionnaire without these questions and the modifications described in Chapter III would take about 20 minutes to administer by telephone. Including the screening interview, the whole interview would take less than 24 minutes.



#### **4. The Minimum Set of Information that Should Be Collected by a Survey on the Reasons for Nonparticipation**

FNS may consider fielding this survey as an additional module to an existing survey rather than a stand-alone survey. In this case, the length of the questionnaire will be limited. We believe that any survey on the reasons for nonparticipation should include at a minimum:

- C ***The Direct Questions about the Reasons for Nonparticipation.*** We recommend that a survey on the reasons for nonparticipation include the questions contained in Section E of the questionnaires used in the pretest.
- C ***The Food Security Questions.*** It is critically important that any survey on the reasons for nonparticipation collect data on food security. If the majority of nonparticipants are estimated to be food insecure, then this suggests nonparticipation is a problem, as those needing food assistance are not being reached by the program. However, if most are food secure, then the FSP may be meeting its mission of providing food assistance to those who need it and low rates of nonparticipation are not a cause for concern.
- C ***Questions on Income.*** It is important that detailed information on income and earnings is collected in a survey of the reasons for nonparticipation. This will allow us to conduct the analyses on samples of respondents who not only pass the screens in the short screening interview but also when asked detailed questions about income, have household income consistent with eligibility in the FSP. Including persons in the sample who are ineligible can bias the results. Estimates of the proportion of nonparticipants who are not participating because they think they are ineligible and because they don't need food stamps will both be biased upwards if we include persons who are ineligible for food stamps in the sample.
- C ***Questions on the Receipt of Food Assistance from Sources other than the FSP.*** Given the high proportion of nonparticipants who gave reasons for nonparticipation related to a lack of need for food stamps, it is important to ascertain whether nonparticipants who say they don't need food stamps have access to other sources of food assistance.

These questions could be administered in 15 minutes. If the complete screening interview was also administered, the whole module on nonparticipation would take less than 20 minutes to administer.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conducting a survey about the reasons for nonparticipation in the FSP poses three main challenges. First, it is difficult to locate persons to interview who are eligible for food stamps but do not receive them. Because no lists exist of these eligible nonparticipants, a random-digit-dialing (RDD) frame is required. Second, the questions at the beginning of the interview that screen out persons not eligible for the survey need to strike a balance between collecting detailed and sensitive information to accurately determine eligibility and minimizing nonresponse. Third, the questionnaires need to collect sufficient information about the reasons for nonparticipation to inform policy decisions. The purpose of the pretest was to investigate whether these challenges could be met.

This chapter presents the main conclusions from the pretest and our recommendations for fielding the survey on a national scale.<sup>40</sup>

### A. IT IS FEASIBLE TO CONDUCT A STAND-ALONE SURVEY ON THE REASONS FOR NONPARTICIPATION

The pretest showed that it is feasible to conduct a stand-alone survey about the reasons for nonparticipation. However, the survey would require considerable survey resources, mainly because of the difficulties identifying survey respondents. Using RDD, we called nearly 17,000 telephone numbers to identify 484 eligible nonparticipants and 92 participants from working or elderly households. We estimate that it would take over 18,000 hours of interviewer labor to identify a sample of about 1,000 eligible nonparticipants from working households and 1,000 eligible nonparticipants from elderly households.

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<sup>40</sup> Specific recommendations about changes to individual questions are provided at the end of Chapters II, III, and IV and in Appendix A.

## **B. A LIST FRAME IS NEEDED IF THE SURVEY IS TO INCLUDE FSP PARTICIPANTS**

If RDD is being used to identify nonparticipants, identifying participants *at the same time* requires little additional interviewer time. However, because we found participants to be rarer than FSP-eligible nonparticipants among working and elderly households, it would take more calls to identify a FSP participant than it would to identify a FSP-eligible nonparticipant. Unless the survey design calls for a ratio of nonparticipants to participants of above six for working households and above four for elderly households, the target for the number of nonparticipants in the sample would be reached before the target for the number of participants. Once the target for nonparticipants is reached, identifying additional participants using RDD will be many times more costly than identifying the participants using a list frame. Hence, if it is decided that the survey should include participants, a mixed-frame design would be the most efficient one.

## **C. A FINAL RESPONSE RATE OF ABOUT 65 PERCENT COULD BE ACHIEVED ON A STAND-ALONE SURVEY ON THE REASONS FOR NONPARTICIPATION**

Nonresponse is a concern because the persons who do not respond to a survey may differ from those who do in ways that are related to the reasons for nonparticipation. If the factors that determine whether a person responds are related to the reasons for nonparticipation, the survey findings will be biased--the observed findings will differ from the findings that we *would* have observed if there had been no nonresponse.

The response rate to a stand-alone survey about the reasons for nonparticipation is unlikely to be high for three reasons. First, response rates to RDD surveys are typically low. Use of answering machines, call-forwarding, and telephone solicitation all contribute to low response rates to RDD surveys.<sup>41</sup> Obtaining

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<sup>41</sup>Massey et al. (1997).

a response rate above 70 percent for an RDD survey is rare.<sup>42</sup> Second, the RDD screening interview includes questions about household income and assets--questions that are both difficult and sensitive. Third, nonparticipants may be uninterested in topics related to a program that they have chosen not to participate in.

The overall response rate to the pretest survey was about 51 percent--the response rate to the screening interviews was just under 60 percent; the completion rate to the main questionnaires was 85 percent. One factor that lowered the response rates in the pretest was that two of the eight pretest sites were large northeastern metropolitan cities that typically have low survey response rates. With the recommended changes to the survey discussed below, we think the response rate to the screening interviews in a national survey could be as high as 70 percent and the completion rate to the main questionnaire as high as 90 or 95 percent, yielding an overall response rate of 63 to 67 percent.

To improve the response rates, we recommend the following changes to the pretest.

1. ***Change the Order of the Questions on the RDD Screening Interview.*** The first interview questions should be nonthreatening questions that are related to the topic of the questionnaire. Instead of asking first about household size and income, we recommend asking about the respondent's participation in the FSP and then whether his or her household contains a working or an elderly person. The interviewer could then ask the respondent whether he or she has ever received food stamps. Only after these questions should the interviewer ask about the respondent's income.
2. ***Add More Interviewer Probes to the Screening Interview.*** We found in the pretest that including interviewer probes after an initial nonresponse to the income question was successful at eliciting responses. We recommend adding similar probes after the asset questions. We also suggest probing respondents about inconsistent responses to questions about the receipt of food stamps before counting them as nonresponders.

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<sup>42</sup>Massey et al. (1997).

3. ***Send an Advance Letter to Persons on the RDD Sample Frame.*** We recommend that before calling, persons on the RDD sample frame who have listed telephone numbers and addresses are sent a letter that explains the study and encourages their participation.
4. ***Lengthen the Field Period.*** Our experience has shown that increasing the length of the field period can increase the response rate primarily by increasing the number of telephone numbers for which the residential status can be determined.
5. ***If a List-Frame is Used, Obtain Current Lists of FSP Participants As Quickly as Possible from the FSP Offices.*** Contact information on FSP participants can get out-of-date fast. The importance of obtaining the data quickly should be emphasized to FSP agency staff.
6. ***Conduct In-Person Follow-Up to Locate Persons on the List Frame.*** Some persons who cannot be located by telephone may be located by an interviewer going in-person to the respondents' addresses.
7. ***Use Commercial Services to Obtain More Locating Information on Persons Listed on the List-Frame.*** Commercial services can provide telephone numbers, changes of addresses, and telephone numbers of neighbors for some persons on the list-frame.
8. ***Decrease the Frequency of Changing Respondents Between the Screening Interview and the Main Questionnaire.*** Response rates are lower if the main questionnaire is administered to someone in the household other than the person who was administered the screening interview. In the pretest, we administered the main questionnaire to *the* person in the nonparticipant households who *would* apply for food stamps if the household decided to participate and the person who last applied for food stamps in the participant households. For 17 percent of the interviews, this person was not the person who responded to the screening interview. We recommend relaxing this definition, and administering the main questionnaire to *any* adult in the household who may apply for food stamps.
9. ***Shorten the Main Questionnaire.*** The completion rate for the short-version of the questionnaires conducted by telephone was 91 percent compared with 85 percent for the long questionnaires. We recommend a main questionnaire to be used in a stand-alone survey about the reasons for nonparticipation that would be about 5 minutes shorter than the long questionnaire which took on average 26 minutes to administer. The short questionnaires took an average of 15 minutes to administer.

#### **D. THE RDD SCREENING INTERVIEW USED IN THE PRETEST STRIKES THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY AND MINIMIZING NONRESPONSE**

Most previous studies of the reasons for nonparticipation in the FSP used crude screening rules to create samples of nonparticipants who were likely to be eligible for food stamps (McConnell and Nixon 1996). The RDD screening interview used in the pretest used more sophisticated screening rules that required respondents to answer questions about their income, vehicles, and assets. Even so, we estimate that 38 percent of the respondents found eligible by the RDD screening interview seem to be ineligible for food stamps based on information given later in the interview.

When designing a screening interview, there is a fine line between developing an interview that makes a good determination of FSP eligibility and one that asks so many detailed and sensitive questions that its response rate is unacceptably low. We believe the screening interview used in the pretest, with the modifications described in Chapter II, hits about the right balance between the two objectives of keeping the interview short and simple and doing a good job of predicting FSP eligibility.

#### **E. THE SCREENING INTERVIEWS AND MAIN QUESTIONNAIRES SHOULD BE ADMINISTERED USING COMPUTER ASSISTED SURVEY METHODS**

In the pretest, the screening interviews were conducted using CATI, but because of the small sample sizes, the main questionnaires were administered using hard-copy instruments. A national survey about nonparticipation should use computer assisted survey interviews (CASI) for both the screening interviews and the main questionnaires. In the RDD screening interview, CASI supports sample management and scheduling, aids the interviewer in conducting complex skip logic, and automatically determines whether the respondent is eligible for the sample. CASI also helps in the administration of the main questionnaires, which include complex skip logic, with some questions being asked only of persons with past experience

in the FSP and other questions being asked only of persons who report specific reasons for nonparticipation.

**F. A SURVEY ABOUT THE REASONS FOR NONPARTICIPATION SHOULD INCLUDE A SMALL SAMPLE OF HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT TELEPHONES AND ASK ABOUT TELEPHONE INTERRUPTIONS**

The pretest sample included only households with working telephones. However, estimates from the Census suggest that about 6 percent of all households and about 20 percent of low-income households do not have working telephones. Because households without telephones may have different reasons for not participating than households with telephones, a national survey of the reasons for nonparticipation should include a small sample of respondents without telephones.

Respondents without telephones would be administered both a screening interview and the main questionnaire in-person. Interviewers would go door-to-door and administer both the screening interviews and the main questionnaires in-person. We found in the pretest that the main questionnaires worked equally well either by telephone or in-person.<sup>43</sup> The screening interviews were successfully cognitively tested in-person (Ponza et al. 1997).

Considerable survey resources would be needed to identify households without telephones that meet our criteria for inclusion in the sample. Working and elderly households that are eligible for food stamps but do not receive them comprise less than 8 percent of the population. As non-telephone households tend to have lower income than households with telephones, the proportion of eligible nonparticipants in non-telephone households may be even lower. Hence, the proportion of working or elderly nonparticipant

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<sup>43</sup>Resource constraints prevented including an in-person screening component in the pretest.

households without telephones in the population is probably less than 2 percent of the population. It would take considerable interviewer time to find even a small number of eligible non-telephone households.

Because of the cost of identifying eligible non-telephone households, the sample of non-telephone households would need to be small and designed to yield a *national* estimate of the reasons for nonparticipation by non-telephone households, rather than regional estimates. To reduce survey costs, screening for non-telephone households would take place in areas with a high concentration of non-telephone households. The cost of the in-person survey would be lower if it is conducted when the 2000 Census data are available and areas with a high concentration of non-telephone households can be identified with more up-to-date information.

The required sample size of non-telephone households can be reduced by collecting data about past interruptions of telephone service from households both *with* and without telephones. Many households lose and gain telephone service during the year--having telephone service when they can afford it and having it disconnected when they cannot. Some households that do not have telephones at a specific point of time have recently had telephone service and, conversely, some households with telephone service at a point of time may have had interruptions in the past. In the 1993 National Household Education Survey between 9 and 12 percent of households with telephones at the time of the interview reported interruptions of telephone service of one day or more in the previous year (Brick et al. 1996). We would expect higher percentages of households with interruptions in their telephone service in low-income populations.

Under the assumption that non-telephone households and households with interruptions in telephone service have similar reasons for not participating in the FSP, data on interruptions in telephone service can be used to statistically adjust for the under-representation of non-telephone households (Keeter 1995). We recommend including questions in the main questionnaires that ask whether the respondent's household



has experienced an interruption in telephone service over the previous 12 months of more than one day and if so, how long the interruption lasted.

We also recommend that both FSP participants and FSP-eligible nonparticipant non-telephone households be administered the main questionnaires. Our concern is that it will be particularly difficult to find nonparticipants among FSP-eligible non-telephone households because non-telephone households tend to have lower income and lower-income households are more likely to participate in the FSP (McConnell and Nixon 1996). By interviewing both participant and nonparticipant respondents in non-telephone households information would be collected to determine the FSP participation rate among non-telephone households. It may be that the participation rate is so high among non-telephone households, that nonparticipation among non-telephone households is not a concern.

#### **G. A QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT NONPARTICIPATION SHOULD INCLUDE CLOSED-ENDED STRUCTURED QUESTIONS ABOUT NONPARTICIPATION**

In previous surveys, the questions about nonparticipation were typically broad and open-ended and elicited responses that were too vague to inform policy decisions (McConnell and Nixon 1996). Hence, we designed questionnaires in which there was a series of direct closed-ended questions about the reasons for nonparticipation. Each question asked whether a particular reason was applicable to the respondent. At the end of the series of questions, we asked whether there were other reasons that the respondent did not participate in the FSP. We also asked which was *the most important reason* that the respondent did not participate. For some reasons, more detailed follow-up questions were asked. These closed-ended questions worked well. On their own, they could provide much detailed information about the reasons for nonparticipation.

## **H. A QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT NONPARTICIPATION SHOULD INCLUDE QUESTIONS TO DETERMINE FSP ELIGIBILITY, FOOD SECURITY, AND SOURCES OF OTHER FOOD ASSISTANCE**

It is important in any analysis of the reasons for nonparticipation that the sample contains only persons who are eligible for food stamps. Including persons who are not eligible for food stamps will bias the findings. For example, when asked why they do not participate in the FSP, persons who are ineligible for food stamps are more likely to say that they think (correctly) that they are ineligible for food stamps and that they do not need food stamps.

Because of concerns about the response rate, the screening interview cannot ask all the detailed questions required to accurately determine FSP eligibility. However, some of these questions can be asked later in the main interview when the interviewer has established rapport with the respondent. When analyzing the survey data, this information can be used to make a better determination of FSP eligibility and sample members who do not seem to be FSP eligible can be removed from the analysis sample.

It is important that any survey on the reasons for nonparticipation collect data on food security. The purpose of the FSP is to provide food assistance to all those who need it. If the majority of nonparticipants are found to be food insecure, this suggests that some persons needing food assistance are not being reached by the program. However, if most nonparticipants are food secure, the FSP may be meeting its mission of providing food assistance to those who need it, and low rates of participation are not a cause for concern.

The findings from the pretest suggested that the most important reason that both working and elderly households do not participate in the FSP is a perception of a lack of need for food stamps. From a policy perspective, it would be interesting to determine whether the lack of need is because nonparticipants are

receiving food assistance from other sources, such as other government programs, charities, family, or friends.

# **I. THE QUESTIONNAIRES DEVELOPED FOR THIS STUDY SHOULD BE REVISED TO ADDRESS FSP NONPARTICIPATION ISSUES ARISING FROM RECENT WELFARE REFORM**

The recent decline in FSP participation, from 11 million households in 1996 to 8 million households in 1998, cannot be fully explained by a decrease in the number of households in poverty. This suggests that changes associated with the welfare reform provisions of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 may have decreased FSP participation rates. Of the two population groups of interest in this study, welfare reform is more likely to have affected working households, who because they have often have children, may have received TANF. Elderly households are not directly affected by welfare reform but may have been affected indirectly, perhaps through changes in attitudes toward welfare. Although a one-time survey cannot fully explore the reasons for *changes* in the FSP participation rate, we recommend that the questionnaires be revised to include questions that explore the link between FSP participation and welfare reform.

Welfare reform may have affected the FSP participation rate in three main ways. First, FSP participants who *stop receiving* TANF benefits because they find work, reach the time limit, or are sanctioned for not meeting work requirements may discontinue receipt of food stamp benefits even though they may still be eligible to receive them. This may be because they think incorrectly that their households are no longer eligible for food stamp benefits, they no longer think it is worth the “hassle” to receive just food stamp benefits, or they want to be free of receiving any government assistance. Caseworkers may also not be informing clients that they are still eligible for food stamp benefits, and in some cases, may even be incorrectly terminating benefits. We recommend that when respondents are asked about why they

stopped receiving food stamps benefits in the survey, they should be asked whether they stopped receiving TANF benefits at about the same time. If they did, follow-up questions can explore how the cessation of TANF affected their FSP participation. The respondents can be asked whether they thought their households were no longer eligible for food stamp benefits, and if so, whether this perception was based on information provided by the caseworker or some other source.

Second, welfare reform may have reduced the likelihood that a person *applying* for TANF would also apply for food stamp benefits. Although food stamp applications can still be made at the same time as TANF applications, local caseworkers may be less likely to tell applicants that they are eligible for food stamp benefits. Many states have developed diversion programs that discourage people from going onto TANF. Some diversion programs offer TANF applicants a one-time lump-sum payment instead of monthly TANF benefits; others require applicants to engage in job search as a condition to be met before they are eligible for TANF. Applicants diverted from TANF may not be aware that they are still eligible for food stamp benefits. Caseworkers may not be informing them about food stamp benefits and may even be improperly holding up the processing of FSP applications until the applicant has completed pre-application procedures for TANF. This suggests that the questionnaires should ask respondents not only whether they have recently applied for food stamp benefits, but also whether they have recently applied for TANF benefits. Respondents who have recently applied for TANF benefits should be asked follow-up questions about whether they were told about their eligibility for food stamp benefits when they applied for TANF benefits and if they were encouraged by eligibility workers to apply for food stamp benefits also.

Third, welfare reform may have increased the importance of psychological reasons for not participating in the FSP. Welfare reform transformed AFDC from an entitlement program which provided monthly cash assistance to a transitional assistance program (TANF) oriented toward getting people off welfare and into

employment. This transformation may have increased working and elderly peoples' desire for self-sufficiency and increased the stigma of applying for and using food stamp benefits. The questionnaires already include questions about whether the respondent did or would feel embarrassed applying for and/or using food stamp benefits. For those respondents who report feeling a stigma associated with applying for and/or using food stamp benefits, follow-up questions in the questionnaires could ask whether the respondents feel that the stigma associated with food stamp benefits has increased in recent years. Nonparticipants could be asked whether their desire to be self-sufficient was important in their decision to not participate in the FSP.

**J. A 20-MINUTE MAIN QUESTIONNAIRE WOULD COLLECT SUFFICIENT INFORMATION ABOUT NONPARTICIPATION TO MAKE POLICY DECISIONS**

Ideally, a survey of nonparticipation would include all the questions included in the long versions of the questionnaires. However, because of concerns of respondent burden and response rates, we recommend instead using a slightly shorter version of the long questionnaires that would take about 20 minutes to administer. The questionnaire would still include the full set of questions about the reasons for nonparticipation (with the modifications suggested in Chapters III and IV), questions about food security and sources of food assistance, questions about the demographic composition of the household, and questions about income, expenses, and vehicles. It would also include the questions about previous experiences respondents have had applying for and using food stamps. We would delete from the long versions questions about topics that do not add significantly to our knowledge about the reasons for nonparticipation, including:

- C Questions indirectly related to the respondent's knowledge of the FSP, such as whether the family ever received food stamps when the respondent was a child and whether any relatives, friends, neighbors, or coworkers receive food stamps

- Ⓒ Questions about employment, although we would retain the questions about earnings needed to determine FSP eligibility
- Ⓒ Questions about health and cognitive and physical functioning
- Ⓒ Questions about social supports, such as how long the respondent has lived in the neighborhood

#### **K. CONSIDERATION SHOULD BE GIVEN TO EXCLUDING PARTICIPANTS FROM THE SURVEY**

If the resources available to conduct a survey on FSP nonparticipation are limited, we recommend that FNS consider conducting a telephone survey of only nonparticipants.<sup>44</sup> Conducting a survey of nonparticipants only would provide sufficient information to provide guidance on the appropriate policy response to the nonparticipation. While including participants in the survey would add a richness to the data collected, the information collected from the participants may not justify the additional survey resources required to include them in the survey.

We designed the questionnaires to allow two lines of inquiry into the reasons for nonparticipation: (1) a direct approach--asking nonparticipants why they do not participate in the program, and (2) an indirect approach--making statistical comparisons of the characteristics of participants and nonparticipants. The direct approach--asking people directly why they do not participate--is the more informative and does not require that any participants are surveyed. Comparisons of participants and nonparticipants yield findings that are suggestive of reasons for nonparticipation but rarely provide firm evidence that a particular reason is important. Some reasons that respondents give for nonparticipation, such as the view that other people may need food stamp benefits more, would not be uncovered by just comparing the characteristics or

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<sup>44</sup>Although a survey of non-telephone households should include participants.

experiences of participants and nonparticipants. The direct approach also allows a ranking of the relative importance of each reason for nonparticipation.

If resources permitted including participants in a survey of nonparticipation, including them would yield two main benefits. First, comparing the characteristics and experiences of participants and nonparticipants provides information about the type of people that are more likely to participate. This may be useful in targeting efforts to increase participation to specific population groups. Second, including participants allows the survey to explore what factors help participants overcome perceived or real barriers to applying for or using food stamp benefits that the nonparticipants do not overcome. For example, by comparing the experiences of participants and nonparticipants who began the application process but did not complete it, we could investigate whether completing the application process at a place other than the FSP office increases the likelihood that the application process is completed.

Many of these comparisons between participants and nonparticipants can, however, be made with existing survey data. Comparisons between participants and nonparticipants of household demographic and economic characteristics, sources of other food assistance, and food security can be made using the SIPP and the Food Security Supplement to the CPS (McConnell and Nixon 1996). Comparisons of experiences applying for and using food stamp benefits between participants and nonparticipants can be made using the National Food Stamp Program Survey. Collecting information on participants and nonparticipants in the same survey has the advantage, however, that the data are directly comparable. This would be important if the reasons for nonparticipation are changing over time because of changes in the FSP or other assistance programs, changes in the economy, or changes in attitudes toward welfare.

## **L. CONSIDERATION SHOULD BE GIVEN TO ADDING A MODULE ABOUT FSP NONPARTICIPATION TO ANOTHER HOUSEHOLD SURVEY**

An alternative to conducting a stand-alone survey would be to add a short module about the reasons for FSP nonparticipation to another household survey. The module would begin with the screening questions, and only persons who meet the criteria in the screening interview would then be asked questions about nonparticipation. At a minimum, we recommend a 15- to 20-minute module that includes:

- Ⓒ The screening questions
- Ⓒ The direct questions about nonparticipation included in Section E of the questionnaires
- Ⓒ Questions about whether the respondent has previously applied for or used food stamps
- Ⓒ Questions about food security, sources of food assistance, and income, by source

Adding a module to an existing household survey would significantly reduce the costs of collecting the data since only the additional costs associated with a longer interview would be incurred. Depending on the survey to which the module is added, the response rate to the questions may also be higher. Also, if the main household survey contains detailed questions about income disaggregated by source, the screener for the add-on module could use this information rather than the respondent's estimate of aggregate household income to determine whether the respondent is likely to be eligible for food stamps. This would allow the screening questions to determine FSP eligibility more accurately, as income is less likely to be underreported when the respondent is asked about income by source (Citro and Michael 1995).

The main disadvantage of an add-on module rather than a stand-alone survey is that the module must be short. Moreover, the sample size of FSP-eligible nonparticipants in working or elderly households could be small. Also, the survey design and data collection procedures that were designed for another survey may not be optimal for the module on the reasons for nonparticipation.



A module about the reasons for nonparticipation could be added to any nationally-representative household survey that contains a large-enough sample of low-income households to ensure sufficient numbers of FSP nonparticipants who are in either working or elderly households. Ideally the household survey would also collect data on monthly income, including earnings, disaggregated by source and data on food sufficiency and sources of other food assistance.

The SIPP is a good example of an existing nationally-representative household survey to which a module on the reasons for FSP nonparticipation could be added. Periodically, modules of special interest are attached to the SIPP. For example, the Extended Well-Being Module was administered to Wave 6 of the 1991 SIPP panel and Wave 3 of the 1992 SIPP panel. McConnell and Nixon (1996) estimated that this module was administered to over 3,700 FSP nonparticipants with income less than 130 percent of poverty and nearly 1,900 FSP participants. Of these, there were about 1,500 working nonparticipants, 1,500 elderly nonparticipants, 600 working participants, and 400 elderly participants. The samples of nonparticipants are large enough to conduct an analysis of the reasons for nonparticipation given by nonparticipants.

Another advantage of the SIPP is that it already collects detailed income information, including earnings information, information on FSP participation, and information on the age of household members. A nonparticipation module would need to include screening questions only about assets and vehicles. Interviewers could use information reported earlier in the interview to determine whether income exceeded 130 percent of poverty, whether the household was participating in the FSP, and whether the household contained an elderly or a working person. The SIPP also collects information about receipt of food assistance from other government programs. However, its core files do not include questions about food

security. So a nonparticipation module would also need to include a set of questions to determine the household's level of food security.

The CPS is another example of a nationally-representative survey to which a module on the reasons for nonparticipation could be added. The sample sizes of eligible nonparticipants are quite large. McConnell and Nixon (1996) found that the 1995 CPS Food Security Supplement contains 10,000 respondents with household income less than 130 percent of poverty. Of these, over 7,000 were nonparticipants, over 4,000 working nonparticipants, and nearly 3,000 elderly nonparticipants. One disadvantage of the CPS is that the core interview only collects income information by asking respondents to report their aggregate household income in categories of \$2,499 or more.<sup>45</sup> A second disadvantage of the CPS is that its core questionnaires do not collect data on FSP participation, food security, or other sources of food assistance.

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<sup>45</sup>The March supplement to the CPS contains asset information and detailed income information. It could be linked to the nonparticipation module (even if administered in another month) to make a more accurate determination of FSP-eligibility for households that were in both samples.

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**APPENDIX**  
**OTHER RECOMMENDED REVISIONS**  
**TO THE QUESTIONNAIRES**

In addition to the revisions to the questionnaires identified in Chapter III of the main text, we recommend some additional, minor changes to the questionnaires. In general, these are revisions to correct errors in skip logic or oversights in coding structure that we caught during the pretest. The revisions are as follows:

- C The Questions D4d to D4i do not work if the response to Question D4c is that an authorized representative appointed by the household applied for food stamps. We recommend skipping questions D4d to D4i for respondents who said that an authorized representative applied for them (answered 02 to D4c).
- C In the short elderly nonparticipant questionnaire “be difficulty” should be changed to “be difficult” in Question E12c
- C If no-one in the respondent’s household worked (as reported in the screening interview), then the respondent should not be asked Questions D7c and D7d which ask about difficulties in applying for food stamps related to working. We could not implement this skip pattern in the pretest because the main questionnaire was administered by hard-copy.
- C In the short elderly participant questionnaire, the skip in D4d (codes 01 through 06) should be changed from “skip to D7” to “skip to D5.”
- C In the short working nonparticipant questionnaire, the skip for “00” and “-1” codes in Question D1 should be to D14 and not D8.